

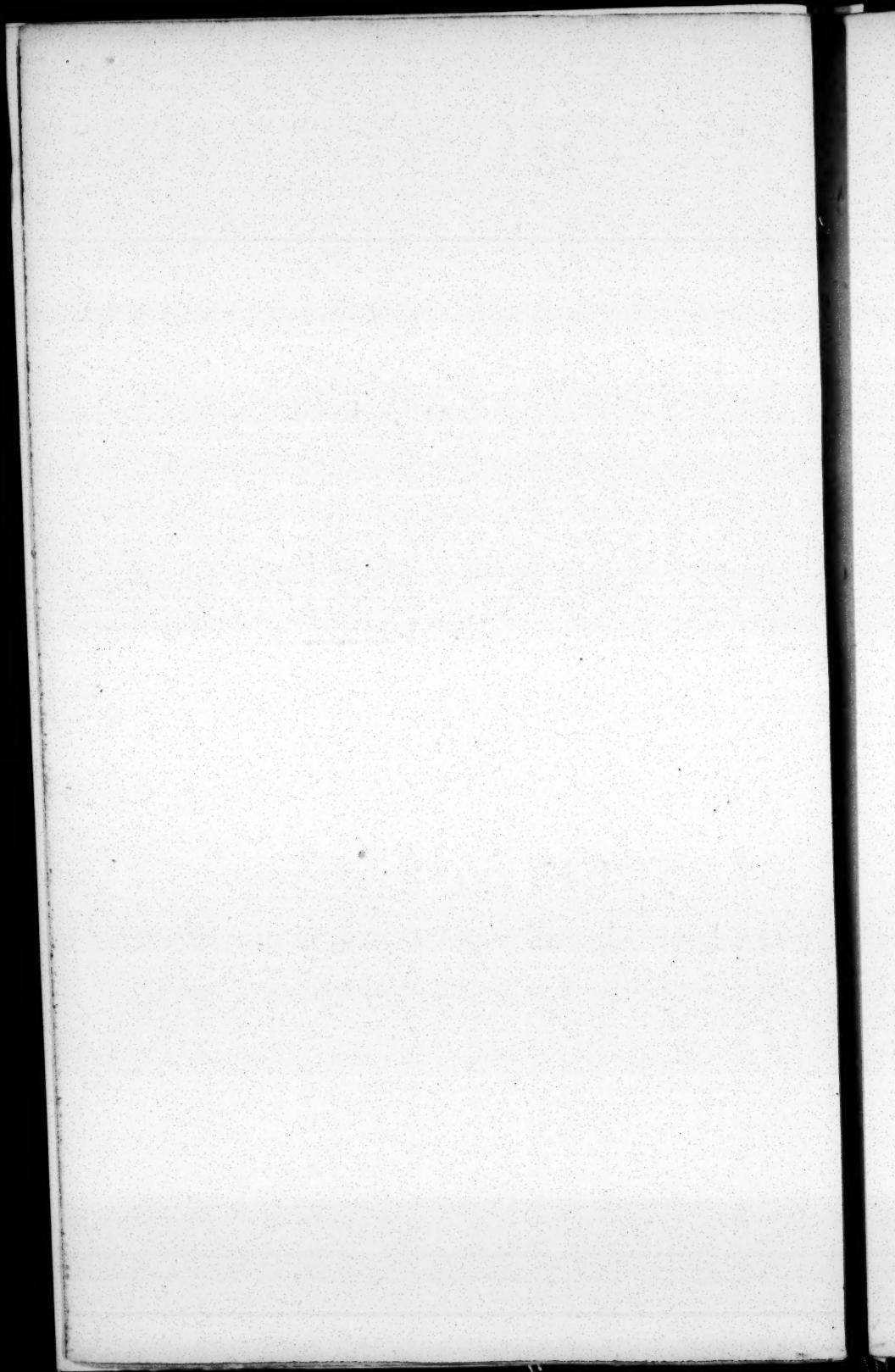
CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

LIFE AND DEATH

OF

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.



CONSIDERATIONS

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LIFE AND DEATH

OF

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

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AND CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS
MAJESTY.

THE SECOND EDITION.

O X F O R D :

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS, M D C L X X V I I .

SOLD BY DANIEL PRINCE;
AND G. ROBINSON, LONDON.

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P R E F A C E.

IT is a fine remark of Lord Bacon, that, “ As wines, “ which, at first preffing, run “ gently, yield a more pleasant “ taste than those, where the “ wine-pres is hard wrought, “ because those somewhat relish “ of the stone and skin of the “ grape; so those observations “ are most wholesome and sweet, “ which flow from Scriptures
“ gently

ii P R E F A C E.

“ gently expressed, and naturally
“ expounded, and are not wrest-
“ ed or drawn aside to common
“ places, or controversies *.”

OBSERVATIONS of this kind may certainly be made, to great advantage, on *historical* portions of Scripture more especially, since, as the same incomparable author tells us elsewhere,
“ Knowlege drawn freshly, and
“ as it were in our view, out of
“ particulars, knows the way
“ best to particulars again: and
“ it hath much greater life for

* *Advancement of Learning*, Book IX.

“ practice,

P R E F A C E. iii

“ practice, when the discourse
“ attends upon the example,
“ than when the example at-
“ tends upon the discourse ; as
“ Machiavel handled matters of
“ policy and government, by dis-
“ courses of history and example
“ taken from Livy *.” The doc-
trines and duties of Christianity
are, in like manner, best deduced
from the facts on which it is
founded. The narration furnish-
eth both matter and method for
the discourse, which is read with
pleasure, and remembered with
ease.

* Advancement of Learning, Book VIII.

H I S T O R Y

iv P R E F A C E.

HISTORY and biography are frequently employed in the service of error and vice. They may operate as effectually in the recommendation of truth and virtue. Example shews truth as it were embodied ; and while it displays the excellency of virtue, demonstrates it's practicability. The contemplation of faith, as it discovereth itself in the lives of patriarchs and prophets, apostles and saints, inclineth us to believe as they did ; and the sight of frail mortals, like ourselves, who, by the divine assistance, surmounted all obstructions, and

con-

P R E F A C E. v

continued to walk in the paths of righteousness, naturally suggesteth to every beholder, the question—What should hinder me from doing the same?

OPPORTUNITIES for such exercises are continually afforded by the return^r of those days, whereon we commemorate the heroic piety of ancient worthies, distinguished in the annals of religion ; whose story presenteth us with occurrences, not, like those related in secular histories, of use only to politicians and generals, but universally interesting ; instructing us in the art of
b govern-

vi P R E F A C E.

governing the little kingdom within ; of atchieving the greatest conquests, and gaining the most glorious victories ; since
“ Better is he that ruleth his
“ spirit, than he that taketh a
“ city ;” teaching us how to live
the life, and die the death of
the righteous ; a twofold task,
which every man hath upon his
hands, and in the performance
of which he cannot fail, but at
the hazard of something more
valuable than crowns and sceptres.

T H E author of the following
Considerations was directed, in the
choice of his subject, by the
cir-

P R E F A C E. vii

circumstances of his situation, some parts of them having been delivered from the pulpit, as occasion called for them, in the chapel of St. Mary Magdalen College, upon the anniversary of the nativity of St. John the Baptist, before a learned and most respectable audience. The favourable manner, in which they were then heard, hath encouraged him to revise, enlarge, and digest them into their present form. The reader hath now before him a compleat history of the Baptist, extracted from the Evangelists, and methodized ac-

b 2 cording

viii P R E F A C E.

cording to the order of time, in which the events appear to have happened ; with such observations and reflections, as the several parts of it seemed to suggest, for the confirmation of faith, and the advancement of holiness.

A N attentive perusal of the subsequent pages may, it is hoped, be of service to the younger students in theology, with a view to whom, and to those more particularly of the Society, whose welfare and prosperity the author is bound by every tie to consult and promote, as they were at first composed, so
they

P R E F A C E. ix

they are now published ; that, beholding the glories which display themselves in the exalted character here offered to their inspection, they may be fired with a noble ambition to bear their testimony to the best of masters, and, from a well spent retirement, come forth bright examples of temperance and purity, zeal and knowlege, integrity and constancy, to preach Repentance, and proclaim Salvation.

C O N-

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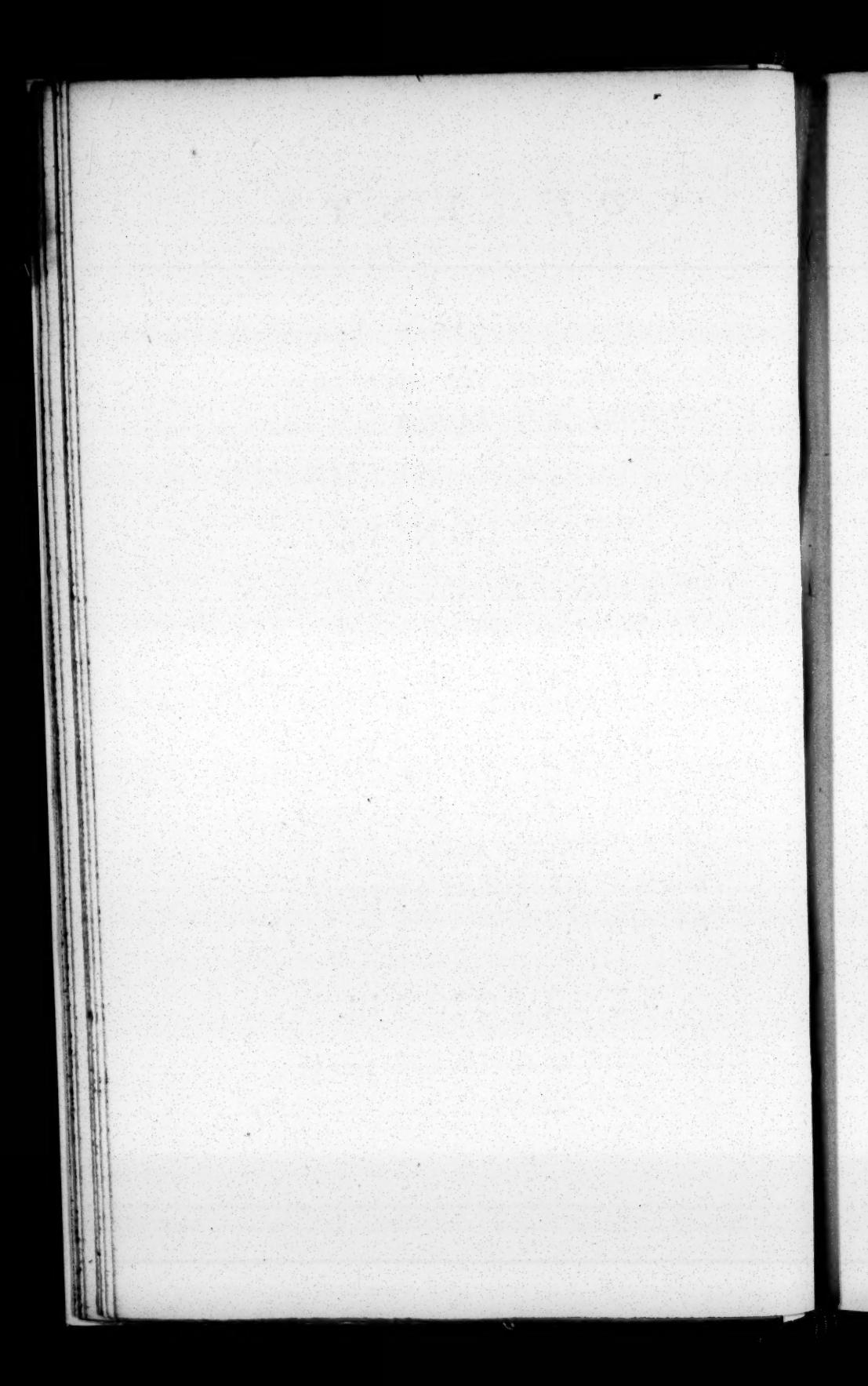
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CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

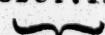
LIFE AND DEATH

OF

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

SECTION I.

Considerations on the nativity of St. John, and the circumstances that attended it.

THE lights of the intellectual, like those of the natural system, are not all of equal magnitude and lustre. In the church, as in the firmament, A SECT. I.  “ one

2 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I. “ one star differeth from another
~~~~~ “ star in glory.” Each contributeth its share towards dissipating the darkness with which we are surrounded ; but some, by their superior splendor, immediately attract and dazzle the eye of the beholder. Conspicuous, above others, is the character of St. John the Baptist, that bright precursor of the sun, and harbinger of the morning, who arose to give notice of Messiah’s approach, and to prepare the world for his reception. Burning, and shining, he ran his course, proclaiming to the inhabitants of the earth, “ Repent, “ for the kingdom of heaven is at “ hand ;” in other words, “ The “ night is far spent, the day is at “ hand ; cast off therefore the works

*of St. JOHN the BAPTIST.*      3

“ works of darkness, and put on SECT. I.  
~~~~~  
“ the armour of light *. Awake,
“ thou that sleepest, and arise
“ from the dead, and Christ shall
“ give thee light †.”

PRAISE is ever valuable in proportion to the judgment and integrity of him who bestoweth it ; and the panegyric is truly honourable, when the panegyrist is one who will not flatter, and who cannot be deceived. How then shall we raise our thoughts to conceive adequately of a person, whose encomium was spoken by the Son of God ; and concerning whom that Son of God declared,
“ Among them that are born of
“ women there hath not arisen a

* Rom. xiii. 12. † Ephes. v. 14.

4 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I. “ greater than John the Baptist*.”

After this declaration made by the master, the disciples cannot well be hyperbolical in their praises of St. John, as the great pattern of repentance ; the relation of Christ ; the friend of the bridegroom ; the herald of the king immortal ; the glory of saints, and the joy of the world.

It is observable, that the Baptist's nativity is the only one (that of Christ excepted) which the church has thought proper to celebrate. The days appointed for the commemoration of other saints are generally those on which they respectively ceased from their labours, and entered into their everlasting rest ; the day of a good

* Matt. xi. 11.

man's

man's death being indeed the day of his birth, and this world no more than the womb in which he is formed and matured for his admission into a better, where there is neither crying nor pain. But the nativity of St. John being designed, by the remarkable incidents that accompanied it, to turn the eyes of men towards one who was far greater; one, the latchet of whose shoes he confessed himself not worthy to unloose; the church keeps a day sacred to it, and directs us to begin our meditations by considering, as all Judea did, when it happened, "what manner of child **" that should be, which was so wonderfully born.

* Luke i. 66.

6 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I.

HE whose works are all wrought in number, weight, and measure, bringeth every event to pass in its proper season. The time approached which had been decreed in the counsels of the Most High, foretold by the Prophets, and ardently desired by holy men of old, when the Son of God should be manifested, to redeem his people from death, and to lead them in the path of life. As this redemption was not to be effected by fleshly might and power, the spiritual king of Israel chose to make his appearance, when the house of David was like a root buried in the earth ; and therefore his forerunner was born “ in the days of “ Herod the king* ;” days, when

* Luke i. 5.

his

his countrymen were under a foreign jurisdiction, and the prospect on all sides was gloomy. True indeed it is, that the sacred lamp went not out in the temple, where the good old Simeon and the devout Anna served God instantly with fastings and prayers, and waited, as many others did, with earnest expectation, for the consolation of Israel. They were not discouraged by the gross darkness which then covered the earth, but rather concluded from thence, that the dawn of day could not be far off; as the mercies of heaven generally come when man most wants, and, humanly speaking, has least ground to hope for them; to the end that he may with thankfulness receive the benefit, and with

8 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I. with humility give God the glory. And this may be an useful lesson to those who shall live in the latter days of the Gentile church, which are to precede the *second advent* of Christ; when they will behold the religion of Christians degenerated into an empty form, and their zeal and love frozen at the fountain; when daily multiplying heresies, like the frogs in Egypt, shall infest and contaminate all things; when infidelity shall rage and swell, and iniquity of every kind shall abound. Sights like these may confound and stagger those who shall then be ignorant of the Scriptures, and weak in faith. But an acquaintance with the divine dispensations will turn them into so many arguments for the

the truth of revelation, and the SECT. I.
approach of the day of God.

“ When these things begin to
“ come to pass ; then look up,
“ and lift up your heads, for your
“ redemption draweth nigh * :”
then be found, with Simeon and
Anna, in the temple, waiting for
the consolation of Israel.

WHEN we read of men, who have done good in their generations, and shone as lights in the world, curiosity naturally leads us to enquire after their connections and relations, and especially after the happy persons chosen to be the instruments of conveying such blessings to the church. The scripture account of Zacharias

* Luke xxi. 28.

B and

20 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I. and Elizabeth is concise, but comprehensive. He was "a priest of "the course of Abia," she was "of the daughters of Aaron," and "they were both righteous "before God, walking in all the "commandments and ordinances "of the Lord, blameless*." The course of Abia was the eighth in order of the twenty four courses of priests appointed to relieve each other in the service of the temple, where, during their ministration, they resided in the chambers allotted them for that purpose; that so, being sequestered from the cares and pollutions of the world, they might "wait on the Lord "without distraction," performing

* Luke i. 5, 6.

the

the outward ceremonies of the law, SECT. I.
— — —
and exercising their faith in the contemplation of those heavenly things shadowed out by them. This holy office Zacharias, in the worst of times, adorned and beautified with a correspondent holiness of life. The spirit of the sanctuary rested upon him, and manifested itself in the fruit of righteousness; a righteousness, which exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees, approving itself in the sight of God, to whom are known the secrets of the heart, as well as in that of men, who are witnesses only of the external deportment. Through the strength of this spirit, he walked in the path of an uniform obedience, an invariable observer of those ordinances which

12 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I. were at that time the sacramental means and pledges of pardon and acceptance, through faith in Him, of whose advent he was a devout expectant. From such a father, and a mother worthy of him, who graced the line of Aaron by a like inviolable sanctity of manners, was the Baptist to descend ; that the Jews might have no possible objection against him ; that he might be a proper forerunner of one, who was to make all the world in love with the beauty of holiness ; that it might appear wherein true nobility of birth consisteth, namely, in a descent from persons consecrated to the service of God, and of an exemplary piety ; and lastly, to assure us, that on the heads of those, who to a holy profession add

a holy life, will, sooner or later, descend the choicest blessings which heaven hath to bestow on the sons of men.

BUT let not such be impatient, because those blessings are for a while deferred. He, who sends them, best knows the proper time of sending them ; and often sees it necessary, for many reasons, to exercise the faith and patience of his servants ; who may always rest satisfied, that in due season he will bring every thing to pass, which will conduce to their true welfare. The scripture, having witnessed of Zacharias and Elizabeth, that “ they were both righteous before “ God, walking in all the com-“ mandments and ordinances of “ the Lord blameless,” proceedeth, in

SECT. I.

14 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I. in the very next words, to inform us, that "they had no child, be-
cause that Elizabeth was barren,
and they were both well stricken
in years *." They, who stand highest in the favour of God, may, therefore, during the greatest part of their lives, want the external and visible marks of it, and lie under the burden of "reproach among men ‡," as was the case of childless women in Judea. But these two pious persons, when their condition, in this respect, seemed desperate, were upon the eve of felicity. For of parents at their time of life John was to be born; that so the miraculous manner of his birth might excite the

* Luke i. 7.

‡ Luke i. 25.

attention

attention of mankind, and dispose them to listen to his voice, when it should be heard in the wilderness ; and also, that it might prepare them for that great event which was taking place, as the prophet Isaiah had foretold ; “ A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.” In circumstances parallel with those of St. John, were born, of old, Isaac, and Joseph, and Sampson, and Samuel, all of them illustrious for-runners of Messiah, in one or other of his three characters, prophetical, sacerdotal, or regal. And did not God intend, by so often causing “ the barren woman to keep house, and to become a joyful mother of children,” to make that power known, by which
the

16 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I. the incarnation of the Redeemer
and the fruitfulness of his church
were to be effected in the latter
days, when, according to St. Paul,
the prophetical injunction of Isaiah
was obeyed, “ Sing, O barren,
“ thou that didst not bear ; break
“ forth into singing, and cry aloud,
“ thou that didst not travel with
“ child* !”

He, who is employed in dis-
charging with fidelity the duties
of his calling, takes the surest way
to obtain the continuation and
increase of his heavenly Master’s
favours. A son was promised to
Zacharias, “ While he executed
“ the priest’s office before God,”
as the ritual of the church en-
joined, “ in the order of his

* Isai. liv. i. Gal. iv. 27.

course,

“ course, and according to the cus- SECT. I.
“ tom *.” The reflection of a
pious writer upon this circum-
stance is no less just than beautiful.
“ One priest alone,” says he, “ in-
tent on his duty, who diffuses
“ the sweet favour of Christ, and
“ is constant in prayer, draws down
“ on the people more blessings than
“ a great number of negligent
“ priests. A man ought,” con-
tinues he, “ to discharge all the
“ ecclesiastical functions with the
“ spirit of the sacred ministry, as
“ before God, and under his imme-
“ diate inspection; to perform
“ them *in order*, in his proper sta-
“ tion, without ambitiously seek-
“ ing an higher; to do nothing

* Luke i. 8, 9.

C “ merely

18 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I. "merely of his own will, but to
~~~~ "observe the well established cus-  
"toms, as being the necessary se-  
"curities of peace. This is the  
"truth which these shadows pre-  
"figured, and these the disposi-  
"tions worthy a minister of the true  
"temple, which is the church \*."

THE annuntiation of the Baptist's conception happened at the time of incense, when his father, having put on the robe of honour, and being clothed, like the great Mediator whom he personated, with the garments of glory and beauty, entered into the temple, while the whole congregation of the people, assembled without, sent

\* Father Quesnel's Moral Reflections  
on the New Testament.

up their united prayers to be accepted at the throne of grace, through the intercession which was then making for them by the levitical priest, acting in the name of him who was to “ arise after the “ order of Melchisedek, and not “ to be called after the order of “ Aaron \*.” While the joint prayers of priest and people were thus offered up with the blood of sprinkling, and the sweet-smelling favour of the holy incense, an angel suddenly appeared to Zacharias, as he was executing his office in the temple ; that being the place to which those blessed spirits, when they visit these lower regions, ever delight to resort, as bearing the

SECT. I.  
~~~~~

* Heb. vii. 11.

SECT. I. *nearest resemblance to the happy mansions from which they descend.*

BUT whether it be, that the glory of celestial spirits overpowers the faculties of human nature, or that man, conscious of having sinned against heaven, naturally trembles at the sight of a messenger from thence, we find, the appearance of an angel had the same effect upon Zacharias, the blessed virgin, and the shepherds: they were all “ sore afraid.” Their minds must be first composed, and put into a capacity of receiving the heavenly tidings brought them by the good angels, who, like good men, manifest themselves by the gracious and encouraging manner of their address, and having removed all misconceived apprehensions,

hensions, proceed to instruct and comfort those to whom they are sent. “ Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a Son *. Zacharias had prayed for the redemption of Israel by Meffiah, and therefore was honoured by being made, in a wonderful manner, the father of his illustrious forerunner. The priest was anxious for the welfare of the church, and the man was blessed in his own private concerns. He sought “ first the kingdom of God, “ and his righteousness,” and the blessing of a son was “ added unto him.”—“ Thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou

* Luke i. 13.

“ shalt

22 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I. “shalt call his name JOHN,” that is, being interpreted, the *grace*, or *gift*; “and many shall rejoice at “his birth:” not only thou shalt rejoice, and Elizabeth with thee, at the birth of a son so long despaired of, and such a son too, but it shall be matter of joy, at the time, to all who look for redemption; and afterwards, thousands and millions shall rejoice at the remembrance of it; the day shall be kept as a festival throughout all generations; with joy and gladness shall it be kept, thanksgiving and the voice of melody. Encouraged by the example of Zacharias, let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, be never weary of waiting for his loving kindness in the midst of his temple. Let it
be

be the delight of their lives to execute their office, every one in that order and station in which he is placed. So will God make them to hear of joy and gladness, and grant them to behold the success of their labours for the conversion of sinners, and the edification of his people. The church, like Elizabeth, shall bring forth fruit in her old age, and her friends shall rejoice greatly, when they hear that the Lord hath shewed mercy on her*.

DISTRUST of Providence, and the accomplishment of it's designs, when appearances are on the other side, will sometimes invade the hearts of the best of men; and

* Luke i. 58.

Zacharias

24 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I. Zacharias himself so far partook
of the incredulous spirit which at
that period had possessed the syna-
gogue, that he “ sought after a
“ sign.”—“ Whereby shall I know
“ this? For I am an old man,
“ and my wife well stricken in
“ years.” How different, in a
parallel case, was the behaviour
of his father Abraham, of which
St. Paul has left us the following
exalted description.—“ Who a-
“ gainst hope believed in hope,
“ that he might become the father
“ of many nations, according to
“ that which was spoken, So shall
“ thy seed be. And being not
“ weak in faith, he considered not
“ his own body now dead, neither
“ yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb.
“ He staggered not at the promise
of

“ of God through unbelief, but SECT. I.
“ was strong in faith, giving glory
“ to God, and being fully persuad-
“ ed, that what he had promised
“ he was able also to perform *.”

The demand of Zacharias, how-
ever, was complied with, and a
sign was granted him in the punish-
ment of his unbelief. The use of
that tongue, which, instead of
giving glory to God, had been
employed in raising objections,
was taken from him, and a silence
of some months was imposed as a
penance for the abuse of speech †.

* Rom. iv. 18.

† Conticescere paulatim oportuit om-
ne Levitici apparatū Choragium, quod
ominoso hoc Sacerdotis silentio prefigura-
tum est; ut sola Messiæ docentis et bene-
dicentis vox in Ecclesiâ audiretur. Witsii
Miscellan. Sacr. II. 494.

26 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. I.

BUT when the wonderful child was born, who, even before his birth, entered upon his prophetical office, and gave testimony to his Saviour in the womb, then declaring, by his exultation, what he afterward did by words, “Behold the Lamb of God;” and Zacharias had acknowledged the GIFT of God, by directing that his name should be JOHN; then the mouth of the father was opened; and to shew us the proper employment of the tongue, when heaven grants the use of it, he “praised God.” Faith restored what incredulity had taken away; “he believed, and therefore he spake.” And his heart having been prepared, by silence and retirement, for the reception of celestial

lestial influences, he was now SECT. I.
“ filled with the Holy Ghost,” 
and brake forth into that divine
hymn, which shall be the subject
of the next section.

S E C T I O N II.

*Considerations on the hymn of
Zacharias.*

SECT. II. AMONG the alterations in nature, which notify the return of spring, no one is more pleasing, than the exchange of a long and melancholy silence, for that melody which then resoundeth on every side of us, in the woods and fields. Solomon hath not forgotten this circumstance, in his short but lovely description of that delightful season. “ Lo, the “ winter is past, the rain is over “ and gone, the flowers appear on “ the

“ the earth, the time of the sing- SECT. II.
“ ing of birds is come, and the
“ voice of the turtle is heard in
“ our land *.” The advent of
Messiah was announced, in a sim-
ilar manner, to the church; and
we may say of it, in the words of
the Roman poet, which, like those
of Caiaphas, contained much more
than he was aware of, who uttered
them,

Aspice, venturo lætentur ut omnia sæculo !

For now, the blessed virgin “ mag-
“ nifieth the Lord, and her spirit
“ rejoiceth in God her Saviour :”
the father of the Baptist “ blesseth
“ the Lord God of Israel, for

* Cant. ii. 11.

“ having

30 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. II. “ having visited and redeemed his
~~~~~ “ people :” the angels themselves  
descend in full choir, to perform  
an anthem in honour of their Lord  
and ours : and old Simeon closeth  
all with his affecting farewell to  
the world ; “ Lord, now lettest  
“ thou thy servant depart in peace,  
“ according to thy word ; for mine  
“ eyes have seen thy salvation.”  
Thus did all “ break forth into  
“ joy, and sing together, because  
“ the Lord had comforted his  
“ people, and redeemed Jerusa-  
“ lem ;” because the sun of righte-  
ousness, by his visitation of the  
earth, was putting a period to a  
dreary winter, and introducing, in  
it’s stead, a new and more glorious  
spring. And as spring is the *morn-*  
*ing* of the year, Cowley’s address  
to

to the material light, which is but SECT. II.  
a faint copy, may be applied to  
the great original himself;

When thou lift'st up thy radiant head  
Out of the morning's purple bed,  
Thy choir of birds about thee play,  
And all the joyful world salutes the  
rising day.

THE hymn which we are at present to consider, is that of Zacharias. The occasion on which it was indited, was the birth of St. John: the subject is the covenant of grace in Christ Jesus: the language is that of the Old Testament, old terms being transferred to new things: the speaker is a priest and a prophet, “ full of “ the Holy Ghost.”

DURING

SECT. II. DURING a tedious interval of  
silence, Zacharias had beheld the accomplishment of the divine promise to himself; and he knew likewise, that the Saviour of mankind would soon be born of his relation, the virgin Mary. We may judge, therefore, what pain and grief he felt, while restrained from uttering that "good matter," of which his heart was so full, that when at length God saw fit to remove the mound, it burst forth at once in an impetuous and irresistible torrent of thanksgiving;

i. *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people* \*.

\* Luke i. 68, &c.

IT

IT was no new thing for "the SECT. II. ~  
" God of Israel" to "visit and re-  
" deem his people." He had often  
done it, when they were in afflict-  
tion and captivity. But *so* to visit  
and redeem, was not all that he  
intended to do for his chosen.  
Through things temporal he was  
desirous that they should look at  
things eternal, and carry on their  
views from a bodily to a spiritual  
Redemption, in which all his  
counsels terminated ; a Redemp-  
tion to be effected by his Visiting  
mankind, dwelling among them in  
a tabernacle of flesh, and in that  
tabernacle offering up the true  
propitiatory sacrifice ; a Redemp-  
tion that should extend to Gentiles  
as well as Jews, and of both make  
one People, a new Israel, of which

E he

34 *Considerations on the Life and Death*

SECT. II. he should be the Lord God, for  
evermore. How gracious this Vi-  
sitation ! How astonishing this  
Redemption ! “ Blessed be the  
“ Lord God of Israel, for he hath  
“ visited and redeemed his people,”

2. *And hath raised up an horn of  
salvation for us, in the house  
of his servant David.*

IN the Old Testament, we read  
continually of Saviours and Deli-  
verers “ raised up” by God, to  
rescue his people, from time to  
time, out of the hands of their  
oppressors. But of them we may  
say, as the Apostle does of the  
Levitical priests, “ They were not  
“ suffered to continue, by reason  
“ of

“ of death \*.” And therefore, we SECT. II.  
may argue in one case, as he doth  
in the other, that no one of them  
could be the true Saviour of Israel,  
the subject of the promises. Nei-  
ther Moses, who brought them out  
of Egypt, nor Joshua, who settled  
them in Canaan, was “ He that  
“ should come,” but they were  
still to “ look for another.” And  
so on, through the whole calendar  
of temporal saviours, who, like  
the legal ministers, “ served only,”  
by their wars and victories, “ to  
“ the example and shadow of hea-  
“ venly things.” The body, or  
substance, in either instance, “ was  
“ of Christ.” For he who arose  
“ a Priest for ever,” arose also.

\* Heb. vii. 23.

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SECT. II. “ a King immortal ;” a mighty  
Horn, or Power of salvation ; a Moses, to deliver us from this  
present evil world ; a Joshua, to put us in possession of the heavenly  
Canaan ; in short, every thing, to fill up every prefigurative character. This mighty Saviour, this omnipotent king of Israel, God raised up “ in the house of his  
“ servant David,” as he had promised, “ that of the fruit of his  
“ body according to the flesh, he  
“ would raise up Christ to sit on  
“ his throne \*.” And to this agree the words of the angel, at the annunciation, “ The Lord God shall  
“ give unto him the throne of his  
“ father David, and he shall reign

\* Psalm cxxxii. 11. Acts ii. 30.

“ for

“ for ever and ever over the house SECT. II.  
“ of Jacob, and of his kingdom  
“ there shall be no end \*.”

3. *As he promised by the mouth  
of his holy prophets, which  
have been since the world  
began—*

IN a matter of so great consequence as man's redemption, God left not the world without information, from the beginning: so that wherever we find ignorance, it must be charged to the account of man, as having rejected, and not to that of his Maker, as having denied the necessary means of instruction. We see the Christian church

\* Luke i. 32.

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SECT. II. now supported, in her belief of  
MESSIAH'S second advent, on which  
all her hopes are fixed by the dis-  
courses of the Apostles, as the an-  
cient church was supported in her  
belief of his first advent, by the dis-  
courses of the Prophets. There is  
no more difficulty in one case, than  
in the other. The ancients lived  
in faith, and so do we. They died  
in faith, "not having received the  
promises," and so must we: for  
though some promises are fulfilled,  
yet others are not, nor can be, in  
this world. Our knowledge is not  
the less certain, nor our faith, built  
upon it, the less firm, because we  
have not exact and adequate no-  
tions of the *manner* of Christ's  
coming, the circumstances of the  
last judgment, and the glory that

is

is to follow. The Facts are suf- SECT. II.  
ficiently predicted ; for an idea of  
the Mode we must be contented to  
wait, till faith shall give place to  
sight. And let the same obſerva-  
tion be applied to the Patriarchs  
and Israelites.

4. —*That we should be saved  
from our enemies, and from  
the hand of all that hate us.*

THE Enemies and the Salva-  
tion, here intended by Zacharias,  
are, without doubt, spiritual. Such  
a salvation therefore, from such  
enemies, God “ promised by the  
“ mouth of his holy prophets  
“ which have been since the world  
“ began.” When he saved his  
people of old from their enemies,  
and

SECT. II. and from the hand of all that  
~~~~~ hated them, his mercy so displayed  
was a figure for the time then pre-
sent, a pledge and earnest of eter-
nal redemption ; as if he had said,
“ Ye shall see greater things than
“ these.” And the psalms, for-
merly composed to celebrate the
deliverance of Israel from Egyp-
tian and Babylonian captivities,
are now used, by the church Chris-
tian, to praise God for salvation
from sin, death, and Satan : they
are sung NEW in the kingdom of
Messiah. “ Old things are passed
“ away, behold all things are be-
“ come new :” legal figures are
vanished, and the terms employed
to describe them are transferred to
evangelical truths. When the pro-
phets composed psalms on occasion
of

of temporal deliverances, they SECT. II.
looked forward to a future spiritual salvation ; as Zacharias, in his hymn, the subject of which is a spiritual salvation, looks back, and has a reference to past temporal deliverances.

5. *To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant —*

THE “ mercy promised to our “ fathers” was, therefore, a spiritual mercy ; and the “ covenant” made with them was a gospel covenant ; for otherwise, God could not be said, by raising up Christ, to have “ performed that mercy,” and “ remembered that covenant.” Accordingly, we are elsewhere told,

F

“ the

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SECT. II. "the Gospel was preached to
~~~~ " Abraham \* ;" and the covenant  
made with him is styled " the  
" covenant of God in Christ +." The Gospel, then, was prior to  
the law, and was the patrimony  
of all the children of Abraham.  
" The law, which was four hun-  
" dred and thirty years after,"  
whatever might be it's intention,  
could not dispossess them of this  
their inheritance ; it could not  
" disannul the covenant, and make  
" the promise of none effect." But  
if, on the contrary, it was design-  
ed to keep up, and further the  
knowlege of them ; if it was a  
standing prophecy ; if it was " a  
" schoolmaster," by it's elements

\* Gal. iii. 8.      † Ibid. 17.

training up and conducting it's SECT. II.  
scholars “ to Christ ;” then cer-  
tainly nothing was wanting on the  
part of God. The Jews minded  
earthly things ; but to infer from  
thence, that they were never taught  
the knowlege of things heavenly,  
would be a method of arguing too  
hazardous to be ventured upon ;  
since, from the behaviour of many,  
who profess the Christian religion,  
it might as fairly be concluded,  
that *their* Master promised nothing  
but “ loaves and fishes.” Israelites  
might set their hearts too much on  
“ fields and vineyards,” forgetting  
or neglecting better things, as men  
are apt to do, who are blessed with  
prosperity in this present world.  
But when they did so, they did  
wrong : prophets were sent to re-

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**SECT. II.** prove the error, and judgments to convince them, that Canaan was not the end of the “ covenant,” nor a plentiful harvest “ the mercury promised.”

6. *The oath which he sware to our forefather Abraham —*

THE amazing condescension of God in vouchsafing, for man’s satisfaction and assurance, to confirm his promise by an oath, is finely touched upon in the epistle to the Hebrews. “ When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, saying, surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee — For men verily

“ verily swear by a greater, and SECT. II.  
“ an oath for confirmation is to  
“ them an end of all strife. Where-  
“ in God, willing to shew to  
“ the heirs of promise the immu-  
“ tability of his counsel, confirmed  
“ it by an oath ; that by two im-  
“ mutable things, in which it  
“ was impossible for God to lie,  
“ we might have a strong conso-  
“ lation, who have fled for refuge,  
“ to lay hold upon the hope set  
“ before us \*.” O the goodness  
of God, who hath given his crea-  
tures the assurance of an oath ! O  
the infidelity of his creatures, who  
distrust that assurance † !

\* Heb. vi. 13.

† O beatos nos, quorum causa Deus  
jurat ! O miserrimos, si nec juranti Do-  
mino credimus ! Tertull.

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SECT. II.

7. —That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear,

8. In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

THE promise, made with an oath to Abraham, was made, after the intentional sacrifice of Isaac, in the following terms ; “ By myself have I sworn — that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore ; and thy seed shall possess

“ possess the gate of his enemies ; SECT. II.  
“ and in thy seed shall all the  
“ nations of the earth be blessed \*.”

The objects of the blessing here promised are the faithful children of Abraham, whether Jews or Gentiles ; the “ seed,” in whom they are blessed, is Christ ; the manner in which he obtains the blessing, is by “ possessing the “ gate of his enemies,” that is, by subduing them, and seizing their strong holds ; the blessing itself consisteth in a redemption from bondage under those enemies, and an admission into the service of God. Such is the substance and intention of the promise made with an oath to Abraham, as ex-

\* Gen. xxii. 16.

plained

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SECT. II. plained by Zacharias, and fulfilled under the gospel. In the mean time, between the promise and it's accomplishment it pleased God to interpose a dispensation, which exhibited a visible representation of this great and important transaction, in the case of the children of Israel, or the posterity of Abraham according to the flesh, who, after having been long detained in cruel bondage by Pharaoh and the Egyptians, were “delivered out of the hands of “their enemies;” and delivered for this purpose, that they might serve God with a prefigurative service, calculated to last “till “the feed should come, to whom “the promise was made.” For thus Jehovah saith to Mofes, “When

“ When thou hast brought forth SECT. II.  
“ the people out of Egypt, they  
“ shall serve God upon this moun-  
“ tain \*.” So that when, at the  
transfiguration of our Lord upon  
mount Tabor, Moses discoursed  
with him on the subject of “ his  
“ decease,” or, as it is in the ori-  
ginal, his EXODUS, “ which he  
“ should accomplish at Jerusalem,”  
may we not imagine to ourselves  
the deliverer of Israel addressing  
the world’s Redeemer in some such  
words as these—By my hand the  
Lord God of Israel did once  
vouchsafe to bring forth his people  
from the afflicting bondage of  
Egypt; but thou shalt turn the  
multitude of the Gentiles from the

\* Exod. iii. 12.

SECT. II. power of Satan to God. I saw  
the Lord make a path through the  
waters, for his redeemed to pass  
over ; but thou shalt find a more  
wonderful way through the waves  
of death ; and though the floods  
shall compass thee about, yet shall  
thy life be brought up from cor-  
ruption. I beheld the chariots of  
Pharaoh and the mighty host of  
Egypt plunging in the deep, when  
the morning appeared ; but thou  
shalt triumph over principalities  
and powers, and see them over-  
whelmed in the lake of fire. I led  
my people through the wilderness,  
and gave them a law which had  
“ the shadow of good things to  
“ come ;” but thou shalt conduct  
thine through the world, and  
teach them to “ worship in spirit  
“ and

“ and in truth.” I went before SECT. II.  
Israel to the borders of the pro-  
mised land ; but thou art the true  
shepherd of souls, and they who  
follow thee shall “ pass from death  
“ unto life.”

Zacharias concludes his divine  
song with an apostrophe to the in-  
fant Baptist, as one who was de-  
signed by providence to be the  
precursor of such a Saviour, and  
the publisher of such salvation.

9. *And thou child shalt be called  
the prophet of the Highest,  
for thou shalt go before the  
face of the Lord, to prepare  
his ways ;*

10. *To give knowlege of salva-  
tion unto his people for the  
remission of their sins —*

**SECT. II.**

THE law prophesied until John, who succeeded it in its office of pointing out the Messiah, and spake the language of its institutions, when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." "Remission of sins" is the doctrine in which the Christian religion justly glorieth, as that most necessary and fundamental point, in which every other religion fails. The Heathen confesseth himself to be in the dark; he guesseth only what is the will of God, whom he knoweth not. He hath not strength to perform what he imagineth to be such; and he understandeth not the meaning of the sacrifices and lustrations

trations derived to him by tradition. The blood of bulls and goats cannot wash away the sins of the Jew; and his oblations, since the truth is come, which they were intended to prefigure, are preposterous, and impious. The Mahometan hath no evidence for the mission of his prophet, no argument for his religion but the sword, and no heaven but sense. The doctrine of "salvation by the "remission of sins," through faith in a Redeemer, was, from the beginning, the sum and substance of true religion, which subsisted in promise, prophecy, and figure, till John preached their accomplishment in the person of Jesus. Paganism was a corruption of it before that time, as Mahometism hath

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Sect. II. hath been since ; and modern Judaism is an apostasy from it. And shall we go away, and forsake our Redeemer ? To whom can we go ? He hath the words of eternal life : he only can give “ salvation by “ the remission of sins.” It is this religion which enlightens the understanding with true knowlege, and warms the heart with true charity : it is this which alone brings confidence, and comfort, and joy, and bids fear and despondency fly away : it is this which raises the soul, as it were, from the dead, puts new vigour into all her powers and faculties, and animates her to duty, by the powerful motives it suggesteth : it is this which is a counterbalance to the temptations of sense, by the promises made to our

our faith ; which supports the in- SECT. II.  
~~~  
firmity of nature by the glorious
objects proposed to our hope ; and
which triumphs over the opposi-
tion of the world, by the love of
God shed abroad in our hearts : it
procures us the only solid happi-
ness there is in this world, and
opens a way to the felicities of the
next : it holds him out to us, who
is our “ shield” on earth, and will
be our “ exceeding great reward”
in heaven ; who “ guides us with
“ his counsel, and will, after that,
“ receive us to glory — Whom
“ have we in heaven, O Lord,
“ but thee ; and there is none upon
“ earth we can desire in compari-
“ son of thee * !”

* Psalm lxxiii. 24.

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SECT. II.

III. — *Through the tender mercy
of our God ; whereby the
day-spring from on high
hath visited us,*

12. *To give light to them that
sit in darkness, and in
the shadow of death, to
guide our feet into the
way of peace.*

St. John was the morning-star, that preceded the sun of righteousness at his rising ; an event, the glory of which is due to “ the “ tender mercy of our God ;” since towards the production of it man could do no more than he can do towards causing the natural sun to rise upon the earth. The blessed effects

effects of the day-spring which SECT. II.
then dawned from on high, and
gradually increased more and more
unto the perfect day, were---the
dispersion of ignorance, which is
the darkness of the intellectual
world ; the awakening of men
from sin, which is the sleep of the
soul ; and the conversion and di-
rection of their hearts and inclina-
tions into “ the way of peace,”
that is, of reconciliation to God
by the blood of Christ, to them-
selves by the answer of a conscience
cleansed from sin, and to one ano-
ther by mutual love. “ Happy is
“ the people that is in such a
“ case ; yea, happy is the people,
“ whose God is the Lord. They
“ are the children of the light and
“ of the day. Their sun shall no

H “ more

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Sect. II. " more go down, neither shall their
~~~~ " moon withdraw itself ; for the  
" Lord shall be unto them an  
" everlasting light, and the days  
" of their mourning shall be  
" ended."

S E C-

### SECTION III.

## Considerations on St. John's education in the desarts.

**A**LL the information we have SEC. III.  
concerning St. John, from ~  
the time of his birth to that of  
his public appearance, is contained  
in the few following words-- " And  
" the child grew, and waxed strong  
" in spirit, and was in the desarts  
" till the day of his shewing unto  
" Israel \*." There, apart from  
the world, and under the tuition

• Luke i. 80.

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Sec. III. of heaven, he was catechized in the  
principles of divine wisdom, initiated into the mystery of a holy life, and perfected in the discipline of self-denial ;

The moss his bed, the cave his humble cell,  
His food the fruits, his drink the chrystral well :  
Remote from man, with God he pass'd the days,  
Pray'r all his bus'ness, all his pleasure praise.

PARNELL.

THIS dispensation in the case of the Baptist, like many others relative to the prophets, was extraordinary and miraculous ; consequently, not to be literally copied by any one, but in similar circumstances, and under a supernatural direction. Nor has the monastic scheme the sanction of so great an example ;

example; as St. John was under SEC. III.  
the obligation of no *vow*, but having finished his preparation in solitude, came forth to act his part upon the theatre of the world. And it is well known, that, even in those ages when mankind stood astonished at the austeries practised by recluses and eremites, the episcopal or sacerdotal character was reckoned as much superior to the other, as charity is better than contemplation. “ In solitude,” saith a great master of this subject, “ a man may go to heaven by the way of prayer and devotion; but in society he carries others with him by the way of mercy and charity. In solitude there are fewer temptations, but then there is likewise the exercise

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SEC. III. “ case of fewer virtues. Solitude  
“ is a good school, and the world  
“ the best theatre. The institution  
“ is best there, the practice here.  
“ The wilderness hath the advan-  
“ tage of discipline, but society  
“ furnisheth the opportunities of  
“ perfection \*.” To confirm this  
judicious state of the case, it may  
be observed, that the only perfect  
life which hath ever been led on  
earth, was a mixture of the solitary  
and social. Our Lord himself  
passed thirty years in the privacy  
of Nazareth, and then appeared  
in public to exercise his ministry ;  
but still not without frequent in-  
tervals of retirement. “ It was in

\* Bishop Taylor’s Life of Christ, Sect.  
viii.

“ solitude

“ solitude that he kept his vigils ; SEC. III.  
“ the desart places heard him pray ;  
“ in the wilderness he vanquished  
“ Satan ; upon a mountain apart  
“ he was transfigured \*.” But in  
public he preached the Gospel,  
and converted souls ; in public he  
healed the sick, and cast out devils ;  
in public he suffered, and, while  
he redeemed the world, set it a  
pattern of humility, patience, and  
charity.

FROM the circumstance of St.  
John’s education in the desarts we  
may, therefore, venture to draw a  
conclusion which will be of gene-  
ral use, with regard to all mini-  
sters of the Gospel, namely, that the

\* Bishop Taylor’s Life of Christ, Sect.  
viii.

SEC. III. solitary way of life is necessary to qualify them for the offices of the social; or, that he who would serve God acceptably in public, must first prepare himself for that purpose in private. The reason is, because no man is properly qualified to teach *wisdom* and *holiness*, who doth not himself possess them. And a little reflection will convince us, how needful retirement is for the acquisition of both.

THE toils undergone by all who have ever made any great proficiency in *wisdom*, plainly prove close application and deep attention to be requisite for it's attainment. And they who imagine themselves to have discovered a shorter way, conducting them to it without study, will find, sooner or

or later, that they have mistaken Sec. III.  
their road. " Hardly do we gues  
" aright at things that are upon  
" earth, and with labour do we  
" find the things that are before  
" us \* :" shall we then expect a  
knowlege of those which are of a  
high and spiritual nature, without  
any labour at all ? The prophets  
themselves " enquired and search-  
" ed diligently what things the  
" spirit of Christ, which was in  
" them, did signify † ." The royal  
Preacher, endued from above with  
" largeness of heart as the sand  
" upon the sea shore," yet took  
pains, and those no slight ones,  
in the invention and disposition of  
his discourses. For, " in order

\* Wisdom. ix. 16. † 1 Pet. i. 10.

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SEC. III. " to teach the people knowlege,  
" he gave good heed, and sought  
" out and set in order many pro-  
" verbs ; yea, the preacher sought  
" to find out acceptable words,  
" words of uprightness and truth\*." And if Solomon were not exempted from study and meditation, no other man can have any title to hope for such a privilege.

BUT who shall be able to fix his attention, amidst the hurry and dissipation of life ? Who can meditate on wisdom, with the noise of folly sounding incessantly in his ears ? That blessed person, who could suffer no distraction of thought from the objects around him, withdrew from the multitude,

\* Eccles. xii. 10.

that

that he might teach us to do the same, who, alas, are often unable, when alone, to confine our thoughts, for a few minutes together, to one subject. The world, like Martha, is “troubled about many things,” and most about those which are of least concern; so that, besides the profane, the unseemly, and uncharitable discourses, which they must hear who are much conversant with it, the mind of a man suffers not a little from the variety of light and unprofitable conversation in which he is frequently engaged. This scatters the thoughts, and so indisposes them for any speculations that are great and noble, sublime and sacred, that some time is required to reduce the wanderers, to com-

**S E C. III.** pose the spirits, and to restore that tranquillity of soul which is indispensably necessary for the prosecution of religious enquiries. And although the general assertion of a famous recluse, “that he always “came out of company a worse “man than he went into it,” sa-  
voureth too much of the cloister, yet whoever, as the world goes, should diligently note the times when he came out of company a *better* man than he went into it, might, perhaps, find his diary contained in a less compass, than at present he is apt to imagine.

CERTAIN, however, it is, that for the productions of wisdom we are indebted to solitude, as the parent of attention. And therefore many, in all ages, have followed

St.

St. John into the wilderness, and *Sec. III.*  
chosen retirement, not out of any  
morooseness of temper, or misan-  
thropy, but that they might give  
themselves, without let or molesta-  
tion, to the pursuit of divine  
knowlege. In this situation, they  
found themselves always at liberty  
to chuse their companions. They  
could converse at pleasure with  
patriarchs and prophets, apostles,  
martyrs, and confessors, with de-  
vout and learned bishops, and  
others, who once adorned the  
church by their lives, and have  
continued, since their deaths, thro'  
many generations, to edify her by  
their writings. Here they could  
rally their scattered thoughts, and  
fix them upon subjects, whence  
they might extract real profit, and  
durable

**Sec. III.** durable pleasure. For meditations, while employed, in a general and cursory way, upon a variety of objects, like the rays of light diffused in the air, discover not the force and activity which they possess ; it is close attention which collects and unites, and renders them operative. And an ability to bestow that cloſe attention in a crowd, is granted to very few among the sons of men.

A DISPASSIONATE and unprejudiced state of mind is another requisite for the attainment of true wisdom. And as our sentiments take the tincture of our company, persons continually engaged in the world are very liable to be corrupted, as well as dissipated. He who passeth his time with men of base

base and antisciptural tenets, will SEC. III.  
find, when it is too late, that  
“evil communications corrupt”  
good principles, as well as “good  
“manners.” The understanding  
will be blinded, and the heart har-  
dened : wisdom will be shut out  
at every avenue ; and the man will  
sit down in darkness and depravity,  
for the remainder of his days, de-  
termining with himself that there  
is no such thing as truth, without  
ever being at the trouble of mak-  
ing the enquiry. Happy, there-  
fore, is he who, like St. John,  
spendeth his early days in privacy,  
and there acquainteth himself be-  
times with the excellencies and  
perfections of divine wisdom. For  
“Wisdom is glorious, and never  
“fadeth away ; yea, she is easily  
“seen

SEC. III. "seen of them that love her, and  
~~~~ "found of such as seek her. She  
"preventeth them that desire her,
"in making herself first known
"unto them. Who so seeketh her
"early shall have no great travel,
"for he shall find her sitting at his
"doors *."

UPON the same principle, we may account it one of the no small advantages which St. John enjoyed by his retreat into the wilderness, that he was thereby delivered from the vain janglings of the many religious sects and factions, at that time in Judea. For the authors and abettors of such are naturally confined in their views, and obstructed in their search after truth,

* Wisdom. vi. 12.

by having assumed it for a first principle, that “ they are the men, “ and that wisdom must needs live “ and die with them.” Hence they become more solicitous about the defence of their own particularities against those of other sectaries, than careful to advance and propagate the general principles of true religion. This hath been but too much the case for some time past in Christendom, which, like Jerusalem before it’s destruction, is crumbled into innumerable parties, biting and devouring one another ; insomuch that it is now difficult for one writer to lay down a position in theology, which another shall not immediately set himself to controvert with all his might, as heretical and antichris-

K tian.

Sec. III. tian. The dispute soon becomes
a trial of skill, and the passions
and prejudices of the combatants
spread a cloud over the question,
in which truth and charity often
vanish together. Thus dark and
tempestuous are these lower re-
gions. But, by study and medita-
tion in solitude, the Christian, in
heart and mind, ascendeth to a
purer element, from whence he
beholdeth the storms produced
by contending factions far beneath
him, and expatiateth at pleasure
in those fields of light and serenity,
which open themselves on all sides
to his view. He consoleth himself
by contemplating the church, as
she formerly subsisted in original
purity and unity, and as she will
hereafter exist in her triumphant
state

state above, when her members of every age and nation shall all lift up their voices together, and make their sound to be heard as one, in giving Glory to God, and to the Lamb. Disencumbered of passions and prejudices, he followeth after the truth which leadeth to godliness, and the wisdom whose end is salvation.

FOR the attainment of that wisdom a third thing requisite is divine illumination. Wisdom is one of those "good and perfect gifts," which "come down from the Father of lights," and must be sued for, with humility and fervour, in petitions like these—
"Give me wisdom that sitteth by thy throne, and reject me not from among thy children—For

K 2 " though

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SEC. III. " though a man be never so perfect among the children of men,
~~~~~ " yet if thy wisdom be not with  
" him, he shall be nothing regarded—O send her out of thy  
" holy heavens, and from the  
" throne of thy glory, that being  
" present she may labour with me,  
" that I may know what is pleasing unto thee. For she know-  
" eth and understandeth all things,  
" and she shall lead me soberly in  
" my doings, and preserve me by  
" her power—For what man is he  
" that can know the counsel of  
" God; or who can think what  
" the will of the Lord is, except  
" thou give wisdom, and send thy  
" Holy Spirit from above\*? Such

\* Wisd. ix. 4.

gracious

gracious promises are made, and SEC. III.  
are ready to be fulfilled to the re-  
tired Christian. Let but the pollu-  
tions and distractions of the world  
be removed, and the wisdom  
which "is first pure, and then  
"peaceable," will enter in. To  
receive the law, Moses was called  
away from the congregation to the  
top of the mount. Ezekiel beheld  
the visions of God, while a soli-  
tary captive upon the banks of  
Chebar. Daniel was informed con-  
cerning the restoration of Jerusa-  
lem, and the advent of Messiah,  
on the evening of a day dedicated  
to retirement, for the purposes  
of fasting and prayer. St. John  
was an exile in the desolate Patmos,  
when the glorious scenes described  
in the book of Revelation were  
made

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SEC. III. made to pass before him, and he  
~~~~~ was enabled to extend his view,  
through all the different revolu-
tions of empires, and periods of
the church, to the end of time.
And although we no more look
for visions and revelations from
heaven, yet from thence we ex-
pect, according to the most sure
promise of our Master, the gift of
the Spirit, to bless and prosper
us in our studies, to open to us
the scriptures, and our understand-
ings, that we may understand them.
The same Spirit that gave the word,
giveth likewise the interpretation
thereof. And the latter, as well as
the former, is best received in soli-
tude, which appears to be thus ad-
mirably calculated for the attain-
ment of *wisdom*, as it requireth
study

study and attention, a dispassionate SEC. III.
and unprejudiced mind, and that
illumination which is from on
high.

SIN, in the language of scripture, is styled *folly*, to intimate to us, that true *wisdom* and *holiness* are inseparable companions. That, therefore, which conduceth to the acquisition of one, can never bear an unfavourable aspect towards the other, and solitude will be found the best nurse of *sanctity*, more particularly as it consisteth in the exercise of mortification.

THIS is a work which no man can set about, until he knoweth what those failings are, to which he is subject. And such is the power of self-love, that the person concerned is generally the last who

comes

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SEC. III. comes to a knowlege of this most
important point. If neither the fidelity of his friends nor the malice of his enemies let him into the secret, there is only a third way in which it is possible for him to become master of it, which is self-examination, constantly, sincerely, and thoroughly practised. And this requireth stated seasons of retirement; for want of which, we see those, who are engaged in a circle of busines, or pleasures, living entire strangers to themselves and their own infirmities, though intimately acquainted with the follies and foibles of all around them. “In the night,” the psalmist tells us, he communed with his own heart, and “his spirit
“ made

“ made diligent search *.” Then SEC. III.
silence and solitude afforded him
an opportunity of scrutinizing the
tempers of his soul, of discovering
the maladies to which he was in-
clined, and of applying the proper
remedies to each.

THAT medicines may be admi-
nistered with success, it is necessary
to cut off the provisions, which
nourish and increase the disorder.
The world, in the case before us,
is full of such provisions ; and
therefore the patient must with-
draw, for a while, from the influ-
ence of it’s temptations. “ Where
“ no wood is, the fire goeth out †.”
Remove the object, and the pas-
sion will by degrees die away. In

* Ps. lxxvii. 6. † Prov. xxvi. 20.

L solitude

Sec. III. solitude, the pleasures and glories of the world no longer strike upon the senses, and solicit the affections. The soul, therefore, in this situation, like one escaped out a battle to a place of security, hath leisure to reflect upon her condition, and to provide for her future safety. By looking into herself, she perceiveth how much she standeth in need of mercy and grace; and then she is naturally led to look up to heaven, as the only place from whence they are to be obtained. The former of these prospects filleth her with compunction, and causeth her to mourn for her sins with that godly sorrow which worketh a repentance never to be repented of; the latter encourageth her to pour forth

forth herself in continual prayer SEC. III.
to the God of her salvation, until
he have mercy upon her. St.
Peter, when reminded of his offence
by the crowing of the cock, and
the affectionate look of an abjured
Master, went out from the high
priest's hall where he was, and in
solitude, with strong crying and
tears, made supplication for par-
don and peace. In retirement it is,
that we find ourselves best able to
practise all the holy arts of absti-
nence and self-denial, so needful
for the perfecting repentance by
mortifying the whole body of sin.

WHEN men cannot be induced
voluntarily to take this course, they
are often forced into it by Provi-
dence visiting them with some
heavy calamity, which by a stroke,

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SEC. III. like the amputation of a limb,
severe but salutary, separating
them at once from the world, shall
oblige them to converse first with
themselves, and then with God.
Thus was Babylon's haughty mo-
narch driven, in an extraordinary
manner, from society, to learn hu-
mility in the fields and woods,
until he acknowledged the power
and the righteousness of the King
of heaven. And thus the idola-
trous and superlatively wicked
Manasseh became a sincere and
hearty penitent in the solitude of
a Chaldean prison. Nor can we
but admire, upon this occasion,
the wisdom and goodness of God
in fending sickness, as a prepara-
tive for death. Sicknes takes a
man, as it were, out of this scene
of

of things, to fit him for another. SEC. III.
It draws the curtain between him
and the world, shutting out all
it's cares, and all it's pleasures.
It puts away his idle and noisy ac-
quaintance far from him ; and
having thus secured his attention
to the one thing needful, gives
him ideas of the nature of sin, and
the importance of death, the vani-
ties of time, and the glories of
eternity, to which he was before
an utter stranger. Now appear to
him, in their proper colours and
natural deformity, the diabolical
nature of pride and envy, the
brutality of intemperance, the fol-
ly and torment of lasciviousness,
the wretchedness of avarice, and
the stupidity of sloth. Now he
hath no longer any unlawful de-
fires,

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Sec. III. fires, and grieves that he ever had such. Now he is what he always ought to have been, and what retirement, at proper seasons, should and would have made him.

IN morality, as in husbandry, the preparation of the soil is a great step towards the production of a plentiful harvest. If carnal desires are dead in us, all things belonging to the Spirit will live and grow in us. If the affections are disengaged from things on earth, the difficulty of the work is over; they will readily and eagerly lay hold on things above, when proposed to them. If the snare of concupiscence be broken, and the soul be delivered out of it, she will presently fly away, on the wings of faith and charity, towards heaven.

heaven. They who have duly SEC. III.
practised mortification in the school
of retirement, will, at their ap-
pearance in the world, afford it
the brightest examples of every
thing that is “ honest, just, pure,
“ lovely, and of good report.”

WE may, therefore, conclude,
that he who desires to undertake
the office of guiding others in the
ways of *wisdom* and *holiness*, will
best qualify himself for that pur-
pose by first passing some time in a
state of sequestration from the
world; where anxious cares and
delusive pleasures may not break
in upon him, to dissipate his at-
tention; where no sceptical or
sectarian spirit may blind his un-
derstanding, and nothing may ob-
struct the illumination from above;

where

Sec. III. where every vicious inclination
may be mortified through grace,
by a prudent application of the
proper means ; and every fresh
bud of virtue, sheltered from nox-
ious blasts, may be gradually rear-
ed up into strength, beauty, and
fragrance ; where, in a word, “ he
“ may grow and wax strong in
“ spirit, until the day of his shew-
“ ing unto Israel.”

SECTION IV.

Considerations on the Prophecies relative to St. John in the Old Testament.

BEFORE we proceed to view SEC. IV. the Baptist in the exercise of his ministry, it will be proper to look back to the predictions in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, concerning his office and character. We shall begin with that remarkable one, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the M “ Lord.

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Sec. IV. "Lord. And he shall turn the
~~~~ heart of the fathers to the chil-  
" dren, and the heart of the chil-  
" dren to their fathers, lest I come  
" and smite the earth with a  
" curse \*."

As there was amongst the Jews a general expectation of Messiah's appearance, at the time when he did appear, so an opinion likewise prevailed, that the world should be first prepared for his reception, in some extraordinary manner. But wrong ideas of his appearance and kingdom introduced mistakes with regard to the person who should precede and proclaim him. According to the notions then current, occasioned by applying to

\* Mal. iv. 5, 6.

his

his first advent the prophecies SEC. IV.  
which belonged to his second,  
Messiah was to come in power and  
majesty, to confer on the sons of  
Jacob dominion over the Gentiles,  
and make Jerusalem the metro-  
polis of the world. And by mis-  
understanding this prediction of  
Malachi, they had imagined, that  
Elijah the Tishbite should return  
from heaven, as his precursor.  
For this reason it was, that when  
the sanhedrim sent a message to St.  
John, desiring to know, whether  
he were Elias? he answered, " I  
" am not :" not the Elias by them  
intended and expected. But that  
St. John was the person foretold  
by Malachi under the name of  
Elias, we have the declarations of  
our Lord himself to his own disci-

M 2                      ples,

Sec. IV. ples, “Elias is indeed come \* ;” and to the Jews, “If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was “for to come. He that hath ears “to hear, let him hear †.” By these expressions it was evidently Christ’s intention to put his hearers upon the search after something more than the words, in the bare letter of them, might seem to contain. He directed them to go deeper into things, to study with attention the mission of the Baptist, his office and character; to compare together persons, times, and events; and so to discover, in what sense John was Elias, and why Malachi had given him that appellation. But if they did this,

\* Mark ix. 13. † Matt. xi. 14.

and

and were once brought, in the SEC. IV.  
person of John, to acknowledge  
Elias who was to precede the Mef-  
siah, they must necessarily, in the  
person of Jesus, acknowledge the  
Meffiah whom Elias was to pre-  
cede. And therefore, as they were  
obstinately resolved not to own the  
Master, Christ knew they would  
not recognize the servant, or *re-*  
*ceive* this saying concerning him.  
Thus when the chief priests and  
elders interrogated our Lord in the  
temple, “ By what authority dost  
“ thou these things, or who gave  
“ thee this authority ? I will also,”  
said he, “ ask you one question,  
“ The baptism of John, was it  
“ from heaven, or of men ? ”  
They perceived the dilemma, and  
having considered consequences,  
made

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Sec. IV. made the only *safe* answer, “ We  
cannot tell \* ;” an answer which  
did honour to their prudence and  
their caution, but certainly at the  
expence either of their wisdom, or  
their honesty. As sitting in the  
chair of Moses, they ought to have  
known whence the baptism of John  
was ; and if they did know, they  
ought not to have been shy of de-  
claring it.

THAT St. John was the Elias  
predicted by Malachi, we have  
also the testimony of an angel †,  
at the annuntiation of his birth,  
who cites the very words of the  
prophet ; “ He shall go before  
“ him in the spirit and power of  
“ Elias, to turn the hearts of the

\* Matt. xxi. 23.    † Luke i. 7.

“ fathers

“fathers to the children,” &c. And SEC. IV.  
if this be the case, it follows by ne-  
cessary inference, that by “the  
“great and dreadful day of the  
“Lord,” before the coming of  
which Elijah is promised, Malachi  
intends, primarily and immediate-  
ly, the day, not of the world’s,  
but of Jerusalem’s destruction.  
For want of adverting to this, an  
opinion hath prevailed among  
Christian interpreters, that the  
whole prophecy relateth princi-  
pally to the day of judgment, and  
to the appearance of an Elias,  
who shall then precede Christ.  
Whether there will be such an  
Elias at that time, and so the se-  
cond advent will symbolize with  
the first in the circumstance of  
being previously proclaimed by a  
harbinger,

SEC. IV. habinger, like St. John, sent for that purpose, is a speculation with which we shall not at present concern ourselves, resting satisfied with the application of the prophecy, upon infallible grounds, to the person of the Baptist, the undoubted forerunner of our Lord, when he came to visit us in great humility.

God punisheth not sinners, till he hath first invited them to repentance. He giveth fair warning before he striketh; and a day of grace, in which mercy may be sought, and pardon found, always goeth before a day of vengeance and extermination. Elias was sent “before the coming of the great “and dreadful day of the Lord;” John called his countrymen to turn from their sins, and believe in

in their Messiah, e'er yet the de- SEC. IV.  
folations of Jerusalem exhibited  
to the wondering nations a speci-  
men of that almighty power and  
inflexible justice, which shall one  
day lay the world itself in ruins.

THE third chapter of Malachi containeth a most evident and clear prediction of Messiah's advent, with that of his precursor St. John, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in: behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." The prophet goes on to foretell the effects of Christ's advent in the selection of a peculiar people, and

N the

SEC. IV. the purification of a new priesthood,  
~~~~~ to offer new and acceptable offerings. "But who may abide  
" the day of his coming, and who
" shall stand when he appeareth ?
" For he is like a refiner's fire,
" and like fuller's soap. And he
" shall sit as a refiner and purifier
" of silver ; and he shall purify the
" sons of Levi, and purge them as
" gold and silver, that they may
" offer unto the Lord an offering
" in righteousness. Then shall the
" offering of Judah and Jerusalem
" be pleasant unto the Lord, as in
" the days of old, and as in for-
" mer years ;" pleasant as in the
days when their fathers offered in
faith, and the desire of Messiah's
appearance was the ruling passion
of their souls. The rest of the
chapter

chapter is employed in reproving SEC. IV.
the rebellion, sacrilege, and infidelity of the Jews ; and the fourth chapter opens with a description of the day fatal to Jerusalem—“ Be-
“ hold the day cometh that shall
“ burn as an oven, and all the
“ proud, yea and all that do wick-
“ edly shall be stubble, and the
“ day that cometh shall burn them
“ up, saith the Lord of hosts, that
“ it shall leave them neither root
“ nor branch.” For the consola-
tion of the faithful, God by his prophet again foretelleth Messiah’s advent, with the increase, victory, and triumph of the church—“ But
“ unto you that fear my name,
“ shall the **SUN OF RIGHTE-**
“ **OUSNESS** arise, with healing in
“ his wings ; and ye shall go
N 2 “ forth,

Sec. IV. “ forth, and grow up as the first-
lings of bullocks : and ye shall
tread down the wicked, for they
shall be ashes under the soles of
your feet, in the day that I shall
do this, saith the Lord of hosts.”
In the mean time, “ Remember
ye the law of Moses my servant,
which I commanded unto him
in Horeb for all Israel, with the
statutes and judgments.” And
then, when the law hath done it’s
office, and prophesied for the ap-
pointed time, “ Behold I will send
you Elijah the prophet ;” not
the personal Elijah, but, as the
angel expoundeth it, one to preach
and live after the model of his ex-
ample, in his “ spirit and power.”
Thus, in the prophecy of Eze-
kiel, where God foretelleth the
union

union of Israel and Judah in the SEC. IV.
days of Messiah, he saith, "They
" shall be my people, and I will
" be their God, and David my ser-
" vant shall be their prince for
" ever *." Not that Christ was to
be David risen from the dead, or,
when he came, was to bear his
name; but he was to be, in certain
respects, like David, conquering
the enemies, and sitting upon the
throne of Israel. So the forerunner
of Messiah was not to be Elijah
descended from heaven, nor
was he, at his manifestation, to be
called by that name; but was to
be like him in his office and char-
acter. Such a messenger, saith
God, "I will send, before the

* Ezek. xxxvii. 23.

" coming

SEC. IV. " coming of the great and dread-
~~~~~ " ful day of the Lord," that is,  
the day that should " burn like an  
" oven," the day of Jerusalem's  
destruction, mentioned in the first  
verse. " And he shall turn the  
" heart of the fathers to the chil-  
" dren, and the heart of the chil-  
" dren to the fathers, lest I come  
" and smite the earth," or " the  
" land, with a curse." In the cita-  
tion of this passage by the angel,  
one part of it is paraphrased—  
" To turn the hearts of the fathers  
" to the children, *and the disobedient*  
" *to the wisdom of the just* \*." The  
meaning of the whole seems to be,  
either, that men of every age and  
every disposition should be united

\* Luke i. 17.

in truth and charity ; or, as some learned expositors understand the passage, that St. John should bring many of the Jews to have the same heart and mind which their fathers and pregenitors had, who feared God, and believed his promises ; that so their fathers might, as it were, rejoice in them, and own them again for their children ; in other words, that he should convert them to the faith of that Christ whom their fathers hoped in, and looked for ; as it was said by the angel, “ Many of “ the children of Israel shall he “ turn to the Lord their God \* ;” left, all continuing obstinate in their unbelief, till the day when

\* Luke i. 16.

Sec. IV. a rejected Saviour should visit an  
apostate people, the curse should  
be universal.

BESIDES these notices afforded us by Malachi, there is a prophecy on the same subject in the **XL<sup>th</sup>** chapter of Isaiah, to which St. John referred the priests and levites, when they pressed him, saying, “Who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias\*.” But let us take a view of the whole context, as far as it concerns our present purpose.

\* John i. 23.

ISAI. XL. I. *Comfort ye, comfort  
ye my people, saith your God.*

THE future manifestation of Christ's kingdom is represented to the prophet in spirit, with the concomitant signs and circumstances of it. He hears the voice of God directing his servants to comfort his people, by proclaiming certain glad tidings which had been communicated to them. These glad tidings were the tidings of the Gospel. The persons to whom they first came were Zacharias, the blessed Virgin, Simeon, and Anna, who composed sacred songs upon the occasion, and spake of Mef-siah's advent "to all such as looked

O                  " for

Sec. IV. "for redemption in Jerusalem \*."

The same tidings were afterwards published by the Baptist, then by Christ himself and his apostles, and have been ever since preached by their successors, whose commission still runs---"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people."

2. *Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*

GOOD news should be related with a suitable aspect and accent.

\* Luke ii. 38.

The

The manner should correspond SEC. IV.  
with the matter. “ Speak ye com-  
“ fortably,” or, as it is in the  
Hebrew phraseology, “ to the  
“ heart of Jerusalem ;” let your  
words be as cordials, to revive and  
chear her in the midst of her sor-  
rows and sufferings. The topics  
of consolation, to be insisted on,  
are three. First, “ Her warfare,”  
or “ appointed service, is accom-  
“ plished ;” the days of her con-  
tinuance under the yoke of bond-  
age are expired ; the fulness of  
time is come, for her passing from  
that state into the glorious liberty  
of the sons of God ; she will now  
be relieved from duty, and dis-  
missed from the station on which  
she hath so long watched, in ex-  
pectation of the promised redemp-

O 2 t i o n ;

SEC. IV. tion ; she will be “ delivered out  
“ of the hands of her enemies, to  
“ serve God without fear.” Secondly, “ Her iniquity is pardon-  
“ ed ;” the expiation is about to  
be made, which all her sacrifices  
and lustrations prefigured, which  
all her prophets foretold ; the  
blessed person is born, in whom  
God is well pleased, both grant-  
ing and accepting repentance unto  
“ salvation by the remission of  
“ sins,” that men may be “ justi-  
“ fied from all things from which  
“ they could not be justified b y  
“ the law of Moses,” although men  
were justified UNDER that dis-  
pen-sation, through faith in him  
that was then to come, according  
to the Gospel preached before un-  
to Abraham. Thirdly, “ She hath  
“ received

“ received of the Lord’s hand SEC. IV.  
“ double for all her sins ;” she  
hath received greater benefits than  
she had deserved punishments ;  
mercy hath rejoiced against judg-  
ment ; where sin abounded, grace  
hath superabounded.

3. *The voice of him that crieth  
in the wilderness, prepare  
ye the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert  
a high way for our God.*

ISAIAH, while reciting the  
divine injunctions to those whose  
office it should be to “ comfort  
“ Jerusalem,” seemeth to break  
off suddenly, as one interrupted  
in his discourse by the sound of

SEC. IV. a voice\*. And as if he had listened, and perceived it to be the sound of that voice which so many prophets and kings had desired to hear, and had not heard it, namely, the voice proclaiming the actual incarnation of Messiah, he breaks forth in transport, “The “voice of him that crieth in the “wilderness !”

Hark ! a glad voice the lonely desart  
chears ;

Prepare the way ! a God, a God appears.

The voice which thus sounded in

\* “ Far from being the Messiah, or  
“ Elias, or one of the old Prophets, I  
“ am nothing but a voice ; a sound, that,  
“ as soon as it has expressed the thought  
“ of which it is the sign, dies into air,  
“ and is known no more.” FENELON.

the

the prophet's ears, so long before SEC. IV.  
it was really heard upon the earth,  
was that of the Baptist, who, at  
the proper season, was sent, to  
dispose the hearts and affections of  
men for the reception of their  
Saviour, when he should make  
his appearance.

4. *Every valley shall be exalted,  
and every mountain and  
hill made low: and the  
crooked shall be made  
straight, and the rough  
places plain.*

THESE are the words of the  
prophet himself, unfolding the  
counsels of God concerning the  
manner in which Messiah's king-  
dom should be established in the  
world,

Sec. IV. world, and the alterations which must necessarily take place, in order to that end. "Every valley shall be exalted ;" to the poor in spirit, the lowly and contrite souls, the Gospel shall be preached, and they shall be exalted in faith and hope—"and every mountain and hill made low ;" on the contrary, pride of every kind, and in every shape, exalting itself whether in judaical pharisaism, or in gentile philosophy, against the knowledge of God, shall be made low, and subdued to the obedience of Christ : "and the crooked shall be made straight ;" truth and rectitude shall succeed to error and depravity—"and the rough places plain ;" every thing that offendeth shall be removed, and all difficulties

culties and inequalities smoothed, Sec. IV.  
till unanimity and uniformity pre-  
vail. Thus shall the way be pre-  
pared for the King of Righteous-  
ness to visit his people, to dwell  
in them, and to walk among them.

5. *And the glory of the Lord shall  
be revealed, and all flesh  
shall see it together; for  
the mouth of the Lord  
hath spoken it.*

IMMEDIATELY after the proclama-  
tion and preparation made by  
the Baptist, the Divinity was re-  
vealed in human nature, God was  
manifested in the flesh, seen and  
conversed with by all ranks and  
degrees of men, high and low,  
rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles,

P                   Pharisees

Sec. IV. Pharisees and Saducees, publicans  
and sinners. The accomplishment  
of this part of Isaiah's prophecy is  
exactly related by St. John the  
Evangelist, in the following terms ;  
“ The word was made flesh, and  
“ dwelt among us, and *we beheld*  
“ his GLORY, the glory as of the  
“ only begotten of the Father, full  
“ of grace and truth \*.”

THUS we have seen under what  
character the Baptist is held forth  
to us in the predictions of the  
prophets concerning him, as one  
who should go before Messiah in  
the spirit and power of Elias, to  
proclaim and prepare the way for  
the advent of God incarnate. How

\* John i. 14.

perfectly,

perfectly, during the course of his SEC. IV.  
ministry, he filled up this charac-  
ter, will appear in the subsequent  
sections.

## SECTION V.

*Considerations on the appearance, doctrine, and baptism of St. John.*

SEC. V. THE days of St. John's retirement were now ended, and he was to exchange the pleasures of contemplation for the far different scenes of an active life; to behold, with grief and indignation, the sins and follies of mankind, the sight of which must needs be more grating and afflicting to his righteous soul, than a garment of camel's hair could be to his body; to encounter the opposition

opposition of a world that would be sure to take arms against him, from the moment in which he stood forth a preacher of repentance and reformation. But no good could be done to others in solitude, no converts could be made in the desarts ; and he must therefore quit even the most refined and exalted of intellectual enjoyments, as every minister of Christ should be ready to do, when charity dictates an attendance on the necessities of his fellow creatures.

YET let it be observed, that St. John was thirty years of age, when “the word of God came to him in “the wilderness \*,” and commis-

\* Luke iii. 2.

fioned

Sec. V. sioned him to enter upon his ministry ; and the holy Jesus likewise was of the same age, when inaugurated to his office, by the visible descent of the Spirit upon him at his baptism ; to intimate, perhaps, that neither the exigencies of mankind, nor a consciousness of abilities for the work, can be pleaded as a sufficient warrant for a man to run before he is sent, and take the sacred office upon himself, without a regular and lawful call. The institutions of God are not without a reason, and he will not be served by the breach of his commandments.

THE place to which the Baptist first repaired is styled “the wilder-  
“ nes of Judea \*,” a country not

\* Matt. iii. 1. Luke iii. 3.

like

like the vast and uninhabited *deserts* in which he was educated, but one thinly peopled, a comparative wilderness, chosen by him on account of it's bordering on the river. Hither the inhabitants of the neighbouring cities and villages presently flocked in great numbers, attracted by the uncommon sanctity of the new preacher, who thus came forth, on a sudden, from the desarts, like one from another world, without any connections in this, that no attachment might take him off from the duties of his high calling, or any way impede him in the exercise of it ; since a man's worst foes have often been those of his own household, and the ties of flesh and blood have been known to prevail,

where

SEC. V.  
~~~

SEC. V. where tyrants have threatened and inflicted tortures, without effect. And as there is nothing so directly opposite to the profession of a prophet, nothing which so soon or so effectually fullies his reputation, as a tendency to indulgence and sensuality ; in him, who was “ more “ than a prophet *,” we must expect to find a perfect crucifixion of the flesh, with it’s affections and lusts. “ What went ye out “ into the wilderness to see ? A “ man clothed in soft raiment + ?” No, the very reverse ; a man, like his predecessor Elijah, coarsely attired ; “ his raiment of camel’s “ hair, with a leathern girdle “ about his loins ;” and content

* Matt. xi. 9. † Ibid. xi. 8.

with the plainest food that nature SEC. V.
could provide for him ; “ his
“ meat, locusts, and wild ho-
“ ney * ;” a man, whose person,
habit, and manner of life, were
themselves a sermon, and the best
illustration of the doctrine he was
about to teach ; a proper person
to prepare the way for Christ, and
introduce the law to the gospel ;
to shew men what effect the one
ought to have upon them, in order
to dispose them for the blessings of
the other ; that mercy might save
from the wrath which justice had
denounced, and Jesus comfort
those whom Moses had caused to
mourn.

THE actions of a prophet, who
appears, like the Baptist, with an

* Matt. iii. 4.

SEC. V. extraordinary mission, though they
are not to be imitated by us according to the letter, may yet convey a moral of general use. There is no obligation upon us to be clothed with *camel's hair*, and to eat *locusts and wild honey*, nor are we commanded to abstain wholly from *wine*, as St. John did, according to the prediction of the angel concerning him, delivered at the annunciation of his birth, "He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink, and shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb *." But who doth not here perceive, evidently marked out, the opposition between sensuality and the spirit of

* Luke i. 15.

holiness,

holiness, and the impossibility of SEC. V.
their dwelling together under the
same roof? " Into a malicious
" soul wisdom shall not enter, nor
" dwell in a body that is subject
" to sin. For the holy spirit of
" discipline will flee deceit, and
" remove from thoughts that are
" without understanding, and will
" not abide when unrighteousness
" cometh in *." As, therefore,
" no man can say that Jesus is the
" Lord, but by the Holy Ghost †,"
who speaks in the scriptures, who
enlightens our understandings to
interpret them, and who gives au-
thority as well as ability to preach
that great truth revealed in them,
every minister of Christ, who suc-

* Wisd. i. 4. † 1 Cor. xii. 3.

Sec. V. cedes the Baptist in the blessed
work of calling men to salvation,
should mortify the lusts of the flesh, that the graces of the Spirit
may live and grow in him.

By a thorough mortification of the flesh, St. John had gained a compleat victory over the world, which had nothing in it that he wanted. And herein consisted that *greatness* of his character foretold by the angel; “He shall be *great* “in the sight of the Lord*.” Earthly pageantry engages not the attention of the spirits above, unless it be to pity such as set their hearts upon it. They discerned something more truly great in the person of the Baptist, when he

* Luke i. 15.

came forth from the desarts, than SEC. V.
in that of a triumphant monarch,
at the head of his victorious army.

“ Behold,” saith our Lord, “ they
“ that wear soft clothing are in
“ the kings’ houses * ;” look for
them among the attendants upon
the princes of this world, and not
among my servants. They who
thirst after temporal honours and
advantages, must go where such
things are to be had. And let
them go any where, rather than
come into the church, with these
dispositions. For he who would
persuade others to despise the
world, while the love of it ap-
pears to direct and govern all his
own actions, can expect no better

* Matt. xi. 8.

SEC. V. *succes than it may be supposed St.*
*Peter would have met with, had he invited those, who stood with him round the fire in the high priest's hall, into the service of that master, whom they had just before heard him deny. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren * :" attempt not to do it till then, lest thou not only fall into condemnation thyself, but lay a stumbling block in the way of the weak, and cause the name of God and his gospel to be thus blasphemed through thy double-mindedness, while thy life is at variance with thy doctrine. He who undertakes to reprove the world, must be one whom the*

* Luke xxii. 32.

world cannot reprove. All eyes SEC. V.
will be upon him; his actions, his
words, his very gestures and looks
will be observed and canvassed by
his sharp-sighted enemies. It will
therefore behove one, so exposed
on all sides, to abstain from the
least appearance of evil, to stand
at the utmost distance from tem-
tation, and to prevent even the
possibility of a suspicion. The axe
must be laid to the root, and the
passions mortified, till the man
become, in the emphatical lan-
guage of scripture, “dead to
“sin *,” as a corpse is to the
delights and concerns of life.
“The dead know not any thing,
“neither have they any more a

* Rom. vi. 2.

“portion

SEC. V. "portion in any thing that is done
~~~~~  
"under the sun \*."

STRANGE, therefore, as St. John's appearance and manner of life might at first seem, they were presently explained, when he began to preach a doctrine harsh and distasteful to flesh and blood, as the garment he wore, and the food on which he subsisted. "Re-  
"pent ye ;" that is, Be converted, or changed, in heart and mind, in principle and practice, from error to truth, from sin to righteousness, from the flesh to the Spirit, from the world to God ; "for the king-  
"dom of heaven is at hand † ;" a new and heavenly kingdom is about to be set up amongst you,

\* Eccles. ix. 5, 6. † Luke iii. 2.

with new and heavenly laws, under a new and heavenly king, the promised Messiah ; and none but men of new and heavenly tempers and dispositions can possibly become the subjects of it. I am the person commissioned to prepare you for your happy change, by calling you to repentance, and to my baptism, which is “the baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins \*,” through faith in him “who cometh after me,” to confer pardon and forgiveness. I am the messenger foretold by Malachi and Isaiah, sent in this manner to prepare the way of him who is your King, your Lord, and your God, now ready to be re-

\* Luke iii. 3.

R vealed,

SEC. V. vealed, as the Saviour of men.  
~~~ “Repent ye, for the kingdom of  
“heaven is at hand.” Thus did
St. John lay the foundations of
the evangelical edifice in mortifi-
cation and self-denial; nor did his
blessed Master afterward propose
the glories of a crown to any but
those who should be ready to take
up their cross in the way to them.

THE *appearance* of sanctity, put
on by every impostor, is a proof
of the influence, which it hath,
when genuine and unaffected, over
the minds of men. The preacher
will always be attended, who con-
forms to his own doctrine, and
exemplifies it in his life, be that
doctrine ever so rigid. No sooner
was it known, that John, the son
of Zacharias, was come forth from
the

the desarts, and had begun to SEC. V.
~~~~~ preach, but “ there went out un-  
“ to him Jerusalem, and all Judea,  
“ and all the region round about  
“ Jordan, and were baptized of  
“ him in Jordan, confessing their  
“ sins \*.” The discourses of the  
Baptist were sharp and piercing as  
lancets. He applied them home  
to the human heart, swollen with  
pride, and full of iniquity. And  
indeed, much anxiety and wretched-  
ness might be relieved, much  
despair and suicide might be pre-  
vented among us of this land, if  
the members of our church would  
but follow her direction, and as  
often as their minds were oppres-  
sed, and they could not quiet their

\* Matt. iii. 5, 6.

SEC. V. own consciences, go “ to some  
“ discreet and learned minister of  
“ God’s word, and open their  
“ grief, that they might receive  
“ the benefit of absolution, toge-  
“ ther with ghostly counsel and  
“ advice.”

THE wisdom and goodness of God are seen in his manner of proportioning his aids to the exigencies of his people, and raising up reformers, when religion most needs their help, to revive the true spirit of it among men. If we view the state of things in Judea at two different periods, we shall soon perceive how seasonably Elijah was sent at one time, and John the Baptist, that second Elijah, at another. Each was an aera of distinguished corruption, but corruption

ruption of a different species. During the former, idolatry was the fashionable error, which had found its way into the court, and overspread the face of the church. The characteristics of the latter were, on the one hand, a pharisaical hypocrisy, a boast of moral rectitude, which existed only in theory, and a vain confidence in a law which nobody observed ; on the other, a Sadducean infidelity, opposed to the national faith and hope, denying a resurrection, and future state of retribution. Elijah reclaimed the people from the worship of Baal to that of the true God ; John called his hearers from unbelief, hypocrisy, and vice, to faith and holiness.

AN

SEC. V. AN ambassador of heaven, sent  
to preach truth to those who are  
captivated by error, and righteousness  
to those who are enamoured  
of sin, will never proceed far in  
the discharge of his trust, unless  
he be endued with a fervent zeal  
for the cause and the honour of  
him that sent him. Every holy  
person is not blessed with a spirit,  
any more than he is invested with  
a commission, to appear in a pub-  
lic capacity, to reprove rulers and  
kings, to look an angry world in  
the face, and overcome all the  
opposition it can raise against him.  
Zeal, without holiness to support  
it, like a meteor, will blaze and  
expire. Zeal, without knowledge to  
limit and direct it, will waste and  
destroy, like the element from the  
effect

effect of which it takes it's name, when that has burst it's bounds, and rules where it ought to be in subjection. But when knowlege and holiness are first obtained, it is zeal which must quicken and diffuse them, as the sun doth light and heat, for the benefit of the universe. " Then stood up Elias " the prophet as fire," faith the son of Sirach, " and his word " burnt like a lamp \*." And our Lord, speaking of the Baptist, gives this account of him, " He " was a burning and a shining " light †." His zeal was tempered with knowlege, for it gave Light ; and his knowlege was actuated by zeal, for it was Burning

\* Eccles. xlviii. 1. † John v. 35.

as

SEC. V. as well as Shining. His sermons came warm from the heart of the speaker, and therefore found their way to that of the hearer, which was inflamed by them with the love, as his understanding was enlightened with the knowlege of heavenly things.

LET us view and compare together the zeal of Elijah, exerted before idolatrous Israel assembled at mount Carmel, and that displayed by St. John, when he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism.

FOR the sins of the people, and the iniquities of the prince, in the days of Elijah \*, heaven was closed over their heads, the blessings of

\* See 1 Kings xvii, & xviii.

rain and dew were withheld, till the divine author of them should be again acknowledged, and famine stalked through the land, preaching repentance as she went. Israel felt the wound, but owned not the hand that inflicted it. The Almighty had constituted the Prophet his vicegerent, and enjoined the elements to second him in the work of reformation. Ahab and his subjects, instead of consulting Elijah about the removal of their calamities, regarded him as the occasion of them, and the sole “troubler of Israel.” At the command of God, he presents himself before the king, and tells him plainly, “Thou art the man.” Israel is convened at mount Carmel, and reproved. “Why halt

S

“ ye

SEC. V. "ye between two opinions ? If  
~~~~ " Jehovah be God, follow him.  
" But if Baal, then follow him." The false prophets appear on the side of Baal and his kindred idols, to the number of nine hundred and fifty : on the side of the true God, Elijah stands single. The trial is made, and the grand question determined by a visible token of the divine presence. The nation returns to it's duty, idolatry is punished in it's votaries, the heaven gives rain, and the earth brings forth her increase.

ON the banks of Jordan we behold, in the person of St. John*, another Elijah, reproving the people of Israel, again departed from

* See Matt. iii. 7, &c.

the Lord their God, while some, SEC. V.

as the Pharisees, were hypocrites,

and others, as the Sadducees, were

unbelievers. Equally a stranger

to fear and partiality, and endued

with a prophetical power of dis-

cerning that serpentine subtlety

and malignity which lurked under

a specious outside, he rebukes them

sharply, if by any means he might

convince them of sin, and lead

them to true repentance. “ O

“ generation of vipers, who hath

“ warned you to flee from the

“ wrath to come ?” You, who

seem to have taken possession of

the inheritance, as if Messiah would

never appear to claim it ; you,

who trust in yourselves that you

are righteous, and despise others ;

come you to me, to be baptized

S 2 with

SEC. V. with publicans and sinners ? What can be the reason of all this ? What can be your motive ? The business in hand is not one to be trifled with. Hypocrisy has no place here ; nor will the external shew, without the internal work, in this case, avail to any thing, but condemnation. “ Bring forth “ therefore fruits meet for repen- “ tance :” be not barren, but “ bring forth ;” bring forth not leaves only, or fair professions, promises, and designs, but “ fruits,” or good deeds ; and such as may be “ worthy ” of the tree on which they grow ; such as may advance to maturity, and ripen into holiness. “ And think not to say “ within yourselves, We have “ Abraham to our father :” many
will

will hereafter say that, to little SEC. V.
~~~~~ purpose. A descent from the loins of Abraham will profit none, but those who are like Abraham. His true children are reckoned by faith, not consanguinity. Imagine not that the favour of heaven is hereditary and indefeasible in the line of Abraham according to the flesh, or that the divine promises must fail, if not made good to you ; “ for I say unto you, that “ God is able of these stones to “ raise up children unto Abraham ; ” by the power of his grace he can make converts of nations at present utterly barren, unfruitful, obdurate, who shall inherit the blessing which you reject. Nor let the consideration, that Messiah has so long delayed  
his

Sec. V. his coming, induce you to be  
careless and negligent: "for now  
“ is the axe laid to the root of the  
“ tree :” believe me, he is at hand ;  
your trial will soon be over, and  
your fate determined ; the decisive  
and irremediable stroke will be  
struck, if not prevented by a  
timely repentance, a speedy and  
real change of heart and manners ;  
“ every tree which bringeth not  
“ forth good fruit shall be cut  
“ down and cast into the fire.”  
Hitherto God hath born with your  
errors and iniquities, but he will  
do so no longer. The law hath  
been given, and the prophets have  
been sent ; but they are not re-  
garded ; and therefore he is coming,  
after whom no other messenger is  
to be expected from above. He  
will

will be the Saviour of all, who, from a sense of their sins, shall be ready to embrace him as such. I am not that person, but the least and lowest of his servants, sent before to give notice of his approach, and prepare you to receive him. “ I indeed baptize you with “ water unto repentance ;” but it is he who must grant remission of sins repented of ; “ he that cometh “ after me is mightier than I, “ whose shoes I am not worthy to “ bear ;” he brings with him almighty power from on high, to pardon sins, and confer grace ; “ he shall baptize you with the “ Holy Ghost and with fire,” to sanctify your natures, to purify, enlighten, and inflame your hearts with the desire and love of celestial objects.

Sec. V. objects. At his appearance, he will try and make manifest the tempers and dispositions of men. Deceit and hypocrisy shall not stand before him. “ His fan is “ in his hand, and he will tho-  
“ roughly purge his floor,” sifting and winnowing that which is good from that which seems to be so ; “ and he will gather his wheat into “ his garner,” translate to heaven all that is pure, substantial, and fruitful ; “ but he will burn up “ the chaff,” whatsoever is falla-  
cious, light, empty, and barren, “ with unquenchable fire,” in hell.

SUCH a discourse from such a person occasioned great searchings in the hearts of the people. They found all the vain opinions and presumptions, on which they had been

been accustomed to rely, suddenly SEC. V.  
~~~  
taken from them, and nothing
left, but to put themselves forth-
with under the direction of so holy
and heavenly a preacher. With
fear and trembling they applied
to him, as the affrighted gaoler
afterwards did to Paul and Silas,
saying, “ What shall we do
“ then * ?” And when a penitent
will ask advice of his spiritual
guide, with a determined resolu-
tion to follow it, he is not far
from the kingdom of God. He is
sensible of his disease; and that,
in the maladies of the mind, is
half the cure. St. John, in his
answer, enjoins not legal, but
evangelical sacrifices, exhorting his

* Luke iii. 10, &c.

T converts

Sec. V. converts to shew the sincerity of their conversion by loving their neighbours and relieving their necessities, as God had loved and relieved *them*. “ He that hath “ two coats, let him impart to him “ that hath none ; and he that hath “ meat let him do likewise.” These works of feeding and clothing the poor, including all other acts of mercy under them, are mentioned, as being the most necessary and indispensable ; “ and he,” says a pious writer upon this passage, “ who is “ not moved with his brother’s mi- “ fery, deserves to find God un- “ moved with his own.”

AMONG others that came to be baptized, were some Publicans, or tax-gatherers ; a set of men, whose employment rendered them odious,

ous, as it often tempted them to SEC. V.
court the favour of those who em-
ployed them, or to gratify their
own avarice, by fleecing the peo-
ple. These also were importunate
with St. John, saying, " And
" what shall we do ? And he said
" unto them, Exact no more than
" that which is appointed you." The reflections of the writer above-
cited, upon this case of the *pub-licans*, and the following one of
the *soldiers*, are so extremely sens-
ible, judicious, and pertinent, that
the reader will have an obligation
to me, for presenting him with
them, nearly as I find them. " A
wise preacher, like St. John, should
distinguish the abuses of any state
or condition of life from the con-
dition itself ; he should be so far

SEC. V. from disturbing either the peace of
private consciences, or the public
repose, by condemning necessary
employments, that he ought care-
fully to promote both, by con-
tenting himself with only retrench-
ing the disorders and injustice of
those who exercise them. To be
exact in not permitting any abuses
in employments of this nature, is
to serve the state: and those loose
casuists, who allow and authorize
them, are pernicious to govern-
ments, by rendering these employ-
ments odious to the people, by
favouring their murmurings, by
encouraging acts of injustice, and
thereby giving occasion to rebellion
and revolt.

“ And the soldiers demanded of
“ him, saying, And what shall we
“ do?

"do? And he said unto them,
"Do violence to no man, neither
accuse any falsely, and be con-
tent with your wages." St.
John here, in the last place, regu-
lates the duties of military persons,
and shews, that no condition is ex-
cluded from salvation. The busi-
ness of war is not in itself at all
opposite thereto; since there have
been not only *Christian soldiers*, but
even great saints, and generous mar-
tyrs, of that profession. If all war
was contrary to the Gospel, St.
John would not have allowed
those, who presented themselves be-
fore him, to continue in that state.
However, it is certainly full of ob-
stacles to salvation, which are with
difficulty surmounted. A state,
which is generally embraced either
out

Sec. V. out of passion, or libertinism, or through a blind destination of birth, the exercises whereof are so violent and tumultuous, agrees but little with the exercises of christianity, or the spirit of the Gospel, which is all peace, charity, and meekness. It is notwithstanding just and necessary, that there should be men to defend the state ; but it is still more just and necessary, that this should not be done at the expence of salvation. The grace of God can do every thing : this is what ought to comfort those who intend to serve *him*, in serving their king and country *.”

ONE cannot but observe the general agreement and harmony

* Quesnel.

which

which seem to have prevailed, at SEC. V.
~~~~~ this time, among men, otherwise of tempers and dispositions very different from, and opposite to each other. Jews and Gentiles, Pharisees and Publicans, Sadducees and Soldiers, all confess their sins, and participate of the same baptism; all struck with apprehensions of some impending evil, all flying from the wrath to come; forgetting their mutual hostilities and antipathies, and, like the creatures in the days of Noah, taking refuge together in the A R K. As if the prophecy of Isaiah had now begun to receive it's accomplishment, the publicans, who, before the preaching of John, were ravenous as evening "wolves," became innocent as the "lamb." The soldiers,

Sec. V. *soldiers*, who had been formerly fierce and cruel as the “lion,” became tame and tractable as the “ox,” and submitted their necks to the yoke of the Gospel. Such of the Pharisees likewise, who, before their baptism, had been venomous as the “asp,” or “cockatrice,” did, by the worthy receiving of this baptism, and the grace which God gave them, become mild and gentle as the “fucking infant, or “weaned child \*.”

THE concord thus produced in Judea by the sermons of St. John, and the tranquillity which the whole earth then enjoyed, sitting quiet, as it were in expectation of

\* See the Works of Dr Thomas Jackson. ii. 522.

her Lord, betokened the manifestation of the prince of peace. "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan to John, to be baptized of him \*." After thirty years past in retirement at Nazareth, the blessed Jesus was now to break forth, like the sun from a cloud, or a stream from the bowels of the earth, to enlighten mankind by his doctrine, and refresh them with the influences of his grace. The mighty concourse of all ranks and degrees of people attending St. John at the river Jordan, rendered that the fittest place where he might first shew himself to the world. He who knew no sin, but was to take away the sins of all

\* Matt. iii. 13, &c.

U

other

SEC. V. other men, presented himself in  
the crowd of sinners, as one of  
them, and solicited "the baptism  
" of repentance," not that water  
might sanctify him, but that he  
might "sanctify water to the mys-  
tical washing away of sin."

CONFOUNDED at the thought of  
the Master being baptized by the  
servant, St. John at first "forbad  
" him, saying, I have need to be  
" baptized of thee, and comest  
" thou to me? And Jesus answer-  
" ing said unto him, Suffer it to  
" be so now, for thus it becometh  
" us to fulfil all righteousness.  
" Then he suffered him." Jesus  
Christ, as condescending to stand  
charged with our sins, and, to  
that end, being "made under  
" the

“the law \*,” was to fulfil the Sec. V.  
“righteousness” of the law, as it consisted in an obedience to ceremonial rites, as well as moral precepts. In the character and capacity of our substitute, he underwent circumcision, although he had no sin of his own to be cut off; and received baptism, although he had no pollution of his own to be washed away. What Christian can slight the ordinances of the church, when he sees the Redeemer, for his sake, submitting to observe them all?

No sooner was Jesus baptized, but he “came up straightway” out of the river, like another Joshua, leading his people, through

\* Gal. iv. 4.

SEC. V. the waters of Jordan, to the land  
of promise. And as he was “ pray-  
“ ing,” doubtless for success in the  
great work he had undertaken,  
“ Lo, the heavens were opened,  
“ and the Spirit of God,” encom-  
passed, we may presume, with a  
blaze of glory, “ descended in a  
“ bodily shape like a dove,” speak-  
ing better things than that of  
Noah. In this form, emblematical of innocence and purity, it  
“ lighted,” settled, and abode up-  
on him, the Father thus consec-  
rating him to his office, by  
“ anointing him with the Holy  
“ Ghost and with power \*,” as the  
legal ministers were anointed with  
oil. And that no doubt might

\* *Acts x. 38.*

remain,

remain, the appearance was far- SEC. V.  
ther explained by “ a voice from  
“ heaven,” saying, “ This is my  
“ beloved Son, in whom I am  
“ well pleased.” Such are the  
blessings which, in effect, do al-  
ways attend the divine sacraments,  
when duly administered, with pray-  
er. For then the heavens are open-  
ed, and the Spirit is given, to  
conform us to the image of a meek  
and holy Saviour, and, through  
him, to make us acceptable in  
the sight of God.

## SECTION VI.

*Considerations on the testimony born by  
St. John, at different times, to the  
Messiahship of Jesus.*

Sec. VI. **W**HEN a servant of God,   
~~ through the power of divine grace, hath made some proficiency in holiness, and feeth the world and the flesh under his feet, it is not uncommon for his third enemy, the devil, to set upon him, and prevail over him, by puffing him up with a conceit of his own excellency, and so rendering his very attainments an occasion of his falling. The hurt which

which a man receives, in such a SEC. VI.  
case, is proportionable to the  
height from which he falls ; as  
hell was first prepared for the  
tempter himself, because he fell  
from heaven.

IT is not, therefore, the least  
conspicuous part of St. John's  
character, that a sanctity so ex-  
traordinary was not in him accom-  
panied with any degree of pride,  
a worm which often cankers the  
fairest fruits that grow in the gar-  
den of God. He heard his own  
praise echoed from every quarter,  
and " all men," struck with ad-  
miration at what was about to  
happen, " mused in their hearts  
" concerning him, whether he was  
" the Christ \*." Nay, the San-

\* Luke iii. 15.

hedrim,

Sec. VI. hedrim, that they might be resolved in so important a point, sent a formal deputation of “ priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to enquire of him, Who art thou \*.” As the Baptist was, at that time, in high repute among his countrymen, and as secular designs are sometimes covered with spiritual pretences, it is not impossible, but that they might hope to flatter him into an acknowledgment of his being “ some great one,” and to frame of him a Messiah adapted to their purposes. But John was neither ambitious of an honour which did not belong to him, nor ashamed of a Master, who was about to appear in the form of a

\* John i. 19, &c.

servant.

servant. He took no glory to him- SEC. VI.  
self, but remitted it all where he  
knew it to be due. "He con-  
fessed, and denied not, but con-  
fessed, I am not the Christ. And  
they asked him, What then?  
"Art thou Elias," that is, Elijah  
the Tishbite, whom they expected  
from heaven? "And he saith, I  
am not. Art thou O *ωρφητης*,  
*the prophet*," meaning probably  
Jeremias, or one of the pro-  
phets," whom, as it appears by  
Matt. xvi. 14. the Jews looked  
for to arise from the dead. "And  
he answered, No."

To all these enquiries, made by  
the priests and Levites deputed  
from the Sanhedrim, St. John re-  
turned answers which were true,  
but concise as possible, that they

X might

SEC. VI. might take no advantage of his words, being aware that they grew envious of his fame, jealous for their own authority, and fearful of a Messiah, who would not answer their hopes, by gratifying their avarice and ambition. “ Then said they to him, Who art thou, “ that we may give an answer to “ them that sent us ? What sayest “ thou of thyself ? He said, I am “ the voice of one crying in the “ wilderness, Make straight the “ way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.” This was informing them plainly enough, that the prophecies were soon to be accomplished by the manifestation of Messiah ; and that repentance, according to his doctrine and baptism, was the only preparation fit and

and necessary to be made, for the SEC. VI.  
reception of their King.

“ THEY who were sent were of  
“ the Pharisees,” and consequently  
could not relish tidings which put  
an end to all their schemes of tem-  
poral dominion, and earthly gran-  
deur, inculcating, instead of them,  
the duties of mortification and self-  
denial. This was not *their* system ;  
and many, in every age since, have  
been of the same opinion, not  
caring to receive Christ, unless he  
came to them with the world in  
his hand. Finding, therefore, that  
John had no vanity to be worked  
upon, they had recourse to other  
measures, and began to dispute his  
commission to baptize ; “ They  
“ asked him, and said unto him,  
“ Why baptizest thou then, if

SEC. VI. " thou be not that Christ, nor  
~~~~~ " Elias, neither that prophet ? "

St. John's reply shews his own humility, and, at the same time, bears testimony to the dignity of Jesus. " I indeed baptize you " with water ; " my baptism, like my preaching, is preparatory only, leading to another baptism of the Spirit, which shall cleanse the souls of penitents from every thing that defileth, through faith in Messiah and his heavenly doctrine. And this Messiah is not afar off, as you may imagine him to be ; " there standeth one among you, whom ye know not ; " he appears like other men, lowly, unattended, undistinguished ; he doth not, as yet, think proper to manifest his power and glory ; but hereafter

you

you will find him to be far other SEC. VI.
than he seems. As to myself, of whom some are pleased to entertain an high opinion, I am nothing : “ This is he, who, coming after me, “ is preferred before me,” as much as the greatest master is preferred before the meanest of his servants, who is deemed unworthy to perform the least office about his person ; “ the “ latchet of whose shoes I am not “ worthy to unloose.” This testimony did St. John give to the Saviour of the world, in the audience of the priests, and Levites, and the people, “ at Bethabara “ beyond Jordan, where he was “ baptizing.” Intent upon humbling himself, that his great Lord and Master might be exalted, he declared himself a messenger only, sent

Sec. VI. sent to prepare his ways ; and every thing in him, and about him, spoke the same language.

"THE next day," an opportunity offered itself of pointing out the person of Jesus to the people ; "John seeth Jesus coming unto him," probably, to acknowledge him as his friend, relation, and precursor ; "and saith, Behold 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world :'" Behold that blessed person prefigured in the law, and foretold by the prophets ; one that is all meekness and innocence, patience and resignation, without offence in his mouth, without guile or malice in his heart, without spot or blemish in soul or body ; the Lamb, which Abraham told his son Isaac, that

God

God would in time provide ; the *SEC. VI.*
Lamb, by the sprinkling of whose
blood, true Israelites are preserved
from the destroyer ; the sacrifice,
on which are laid the iniquities
of us all ; the Saviour, who, by
expiating, taketh away the sin of
the world, and conferreth righte-
ousness on them that will believe in
him, and accept it from him, being
conformed to his example of meek-
ness and lowliness. This, O all
ye that behold him, “ this is he
“ of whom I said, after me cometh
“ a man which is preferred before
“ me, for he was,” he existed, ages
“ before me,” even from the be-
ginning ; he is fairer than the
children of men, full of grace and
truth ; of divine glory, and celestial
beauty.

To

SEC. VI. To guard against any suspicion
~~~~~ of collusion \* between two persons, who, as relations, might be supposed to act in concert, and favour each other's pretensions, St. John adds, " And I knew him " not, but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said " unto me, Upon whom thou shalt " see the Spirit descending and re- " maining on him, the same is he " which baptizeth with the Holy " Ghost."

FROM this passage we learn, that the visible descent of the Spirit was the sign given to St. John,

\* See the impossibility of any such collusion fully demonstrated by the Reverend Mr. Bell, in his exact and elaborate Enquiry into the Divine Missions of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

whereby

whereby he was to know the Mef-  
siah. Jesus was brought up at  
Nazareth ; St. John was educated  
in the desarts ; and it seems to have  
been so ordered by Providence,  
that no interview had passed be-  
tween them, after they had arrived  
at years of maturity. When Je-  
sus, therefore, came to be baptized,  
St. John had no knowlege of his  
person. But, probably, on making  
the enquiries, usual at baptism, in-  
to his profession, name, and place  
of abode, and finding likewise,  
that he had no sins to confess \*, as  
all others had, he saw reason suf-

\* See Annotations on St. John's Gof-  
pel, by the Rev. Mr. Merrick, Part. II.  
p. 50. and the Works of Dr. Jackson, by  
him referred to, Vol. II. p. 518.

Y ficient

SEC. VI. ficient to conclude, that this was  
the Christ; which might occasion his apology, "I have need to be  
“baptized of thee,” &c. And then, when Jesus came up out of the water, the Spirit descended, and put the matter beyond all doubt. “I saw, and bare record, “that this is the Son of God.” So little account did these two wonderful personages make of their relation according to the flesh. From their infancy they had not conversed together; and when they met, it was in public, that John might bear his testimony; soon after which, he was cast into prison, and saw Jesus no more. An higher, more important, and durable connection, than any formed by consanguinity, engaged his attention,

tention, as it should do that of all SEC. VI.  
Christ's disciples, according to those deep and divine strains of St. Paul ; " The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh, yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are past away ; behold, all things are become new \*."

\* 2 Cor. v. 14.

SEC. VI. THE Baptist, having now lived  
to see the Lord's Christ, and shew  
him to the world, was ready, like  
old Simeon, to depart in peace,  
and to make over his disciples to  
a better Master, who would never  
leave them, nor forsake them.  
“ Again, the next day after, John  
“ stood, and two of his disciples ;  
“ and looking upon Jesus as he  
“ walked, he faith, Behold the  
“ Lamb of God.” Happy the  
Christian minister, who, like St.  
John, lives only to point out the  
Saviour to his people. And happy  
the people, who like the two dis-  
ciples, thereupon follow Jesus, en-  
quire where he dwelleth, enter in,  
and abide with him.

To one of St. John's disposition  
it could not but be matter of con-  
cern

cern to find envy and jealousy stirring in the breasts of his disciples, on account of the increasing fame of Jesus, as being likely to eclipse that of their master. For on occasion of a dispute which had happened about purification by baptism (disputes being seldom managed so as not to produce ill-will)  
“ they came unto John, and said  
“ unto him, Rabbi, he that was  
“ with thee beyond Jordan, to  
“ whom thou bearest witness, be-  
“ hold, the same baptizeth, and  
“ all men come unto him \* ;” intimating, that John was in danger of losing both his credit and his disciples, by means of one, whom they took for a disciple, like them-

SEC. VI.  


\* John iii. 26, &c.

felves,

Sec. VI. selves, as he had been baptized by  
the same master. So ready are men,  
at every turn, to form parties in  
religion, and to set up their respec-  
tive teachers in opposition to each  
other ; the consequences of which  
are, that the hearers waste that  
time in wrangling about a duty,  
which should be spent in practi-  
sing it ; and the teachers, if they  
have not good hearts and steady  
heads, preach themselves, instead  
of preaching Jesus Christ. “ All  
“ men come to him ! ” Great hath  
been the power of this argument  
to kindle the flames of emulation  
and dissention in the church ; and  
the disciples of John did not doubt  
but that the consideration would  
excite in him those passions, which  
they

they felt working within them- SEC. VI.  
selves.

But he was not framed of materials liable to take fire from such a spark. On the contrary, a perusal of the discourse which this address procured from him, is enough at any time to extinguish it, where it may have fallen. He made use of the incident, to bear his last and most noble testimony to the power and majesty of his Lord. So far was he from being offended, or chagrined, because all men resorted to Jesus, that he triumphed in it, as his glory and his joy, as the very end for which he was sent into the world, to preach and to baptize. As if he had said—

W H Y are ye jealous, and why  
do envious thoughts arise in your  
hearts ?

SEC. VI. hearts? Look not to me, or to  
any thing that is in me, but to  
God, who made me what I am,  
placed me in the station, and cal-  
led me to the office designed for  
me ; " a man can receive," or take  
to himself, " nothing, except it be  
" given him from above." And  
ye know the character in which I  
have ever acted ; " Ye yourselves  
" bear me witness, that I said, I  
" am not the Christ, but that I  
" am sent before him," as his mes-  
senger and minister, not to assem-  
ble disciples in mine own name,  
but to prepare men for him, and  
direct men to him. If therefore  
ye set so much by my authority,  
why do ye not credit my testimo-  
ny? To Messiah, not to me, the  
church is to be gathered and uni-  
ted ;

ted; and “ he that hath the bride SEC. VI.  
“ is the bridegroom: but the  
“ friend of the bridegroom,” who  
hath been honoured with a share  
in bringing about so happy an  
event, and who, when it is brought  
about, “ standeth and heareth him”  
conversing with his spouse, can-  
not therefore be grieved and vex-  
ed; he cannot envy the felicity of  
the bridegroom, or desire to take  
the bride from him; but most as-  
suredly congratulates with him,  
and “ rejoiceth greatly because of  
“ the bridegroom’s voice,” find-  
ing that he hath so well succeeded  
in the work in which he was em-  
ployed. This is my very case,  
when you come and tell me, that  
all men resort to the person, of  
whom I have so often testified, that

Z                      he

SEC. VI. he is the Christ ; “ this my joy  
“ therefore is fulfilled.” I have  
no greater pleasure than to hear,  
that disciples go from me to him.  
As the morning star, I only shone  
to proclaim the approach of the  
sun. Now he is risen, I go down ;  
“ he must increase, but I must  
“ decrease ;” he will shine more  
and more unto the perfect day,  
while I shall set and disappear.  
And reason good why it should be  
so. That which is preparatory  
must give place to that which is  
perfective ; a baptism of water  
must yield to a baptism of fire ; an  
human instructor must cede to one  
that is divine. “ He that is of  
“ the earth is earthly, and speak-  
“ eth of the earth ;” in spite of  
his best endeavours, he will favour  
of

of his original, and there will be SEC. VI.  
an alloy of dust and ashes in all  
he faith; whereas " he that cometh  
" from heaven," I mean the bles-  
sed person of whom ye are so  
jealous, " is above all" the chil-  
dren of Adam. When this sun  
shineth in his strength, every star  
is obscured; and the world will  
perceive the difference between the  
discourses of the Master and those  
of the servant, as readily as it dis-  
tinguisheth the glories of the day  
from the pale lustre and faint glim-  
mering of those orbs, which serve  
in some measure to dispel the dark-  
ness of the night. According to  
the grace given unto me, I have  
declared the kingdom of heaven  
to be at hand; but when Messiah  
speaks of that kingdom, he speaks

Z 2                  from

SEC. VI. from his own knowlege ; " what  
he hath seen and heard, that he  
testifieth ;" and yet, though I  
have said so much of him, and so  
many go to hear him, " no man  
receiveth his testimony," as he  
ought to do. Think not this a  
light matter, for no one can dis-  
believe him, without giving God  
the lie ; " he that hath received  
his testimony, hath set to his  
seal, that God is true," by al-  
lowing the credentials of his Son,  
and acknowledging in him the ac-  
complishment of what was foretold  
by the law, by the prophets, and  
by myself. " For he," the Mes-  
siah, " whom God hath sent,  
speaketh the words of God,"  
and that in a different sense from  
all

all others, who, from time to time,  
have been endued with such a por-  
tion of the divine influence as was  
meet for them ; but “ God giveth  
“ not the Spirit by measure unto  
“ him,” having decreed, that in  
him should all fulness dwell.  
“ For the Father loveth the Son,”  
not as he loveth any of his faithful  
servants, but so as that “ he hath  
“ put all things into his hand,”  
dispensing glory, honour, and im-  
mortality to mankind, through  
him alone. Be no longer envious  
and jealous, then, of his greatness,  
which is your salvation. If you  
would honour me, and at the  
same time serve your own eternal  
interest, receive, in few words, the  
sum and substance of this my last  
testi-

SEC. VI. testimony——“ He that believeth  
~~~~ “ on the Son, hath everlasting  
“ life: and he that believeth not
“ the Son, shall not see life; but
“ the wrath of God abideth on
“ him.”

By this part of St. John’s character and conduct, in how pleasing a manner are the ministers of Christ instructed, that they are to bear testimony to H I M, not to themselves; to seek HIS glory, not their own; that they should take pleasure in the success of their brethren’s labours, by which the cause of their common Master is promoted; that the rising lights of the church should do honour to those who have gone before them, and the setting ones rejoice to be outshone

outshone by those who are coming after them ; that envy and jealousy, in short, ought to have no place among the disciples of the Lamb of God, on whom descended and abode the celestial Dove.

SEC. VI.

S E C-

SECTION VII.

*Considerations on the imprisonment of
St. John, the message sent by him
to Christ, and the answer returned
to it.*

SECT.
VII.

ADMIRABLE is the advice of the son of Sirach to every one who is about to stand forth in the cause of true religion. “ My “ son, if thou come to serve the “ Lord, prepare thy soul for “ temptation. Set thy heart aright, “ and constantly endure, and make “ not haste in time of trouble. “ Whatsoever is brought upon “ thee

“ thee take cheerfully, and be SECTR.
“ patient when thou art changed VII.
“ to a low estate. For gold is
“ tried in the fire, and acceptable
“ men in the furnace of adver-
“ sity *.” The reformer will pro-
ceed but a little way in his work,
whose zeal is not backed with
fortitude. The apprehension of
danger, or even the frown of
power, will alter his sentiments ;
he will see things in a different
point of view, and turn with every
blast of fashion or interest, till
he himself believes every thing,
and his hearers, offended and con-
founded, believe nothing.

Not so the Baptist. “ What
“ went ye out into the wilderness

* Eccles. ii. 1.

SECT. VII. "to see? A reed shaken with the
wind *." No: a column firm
and immoveable, against which
winds might blow, and waves
beat, in vain; one who had fixed
his principles, and considered well,
before he entered upon action;
one who began not to build, till
he had first counted the costs; but
who, when once he did begin,
would be sure to finish.

A PERSON unacquainted with
the world, and the tempers of it's
children, might, perhaps, be sur-
prized upon hearing, that a pro-
phet, like St. John, who spent his
time in calling his fellow creatures
to happiness and salvation, and
who coveted no man's gold, or

* Matt. xi. 7.

silver,

SECT.
VII.

silver, or apparel, was cast into pris'fon. But, as the wise man observeth, "The thing which hath been is that which shall be, and there is nothing new under the sun *." Ahab, at the instigation of Jezebel, again thirsts after the blood of Elijah.

HEROD, the tetrarch of Galilee, had put away his own wife, the daughter of Aretas, and had married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, whom, contrary to the laws of hospitality as well as religion, he had seduced, while a guest in her husband's house †. The sanctity and integrity of the Baptist had begotten, even in He-

* Eccles. i. 9.

† See Josephus—Antiq. Lib. xviii.
Cap. 6.

SECT. rod, a great veneration and reverence for his character. "Herod VII.
~~~~~ " feared John, knowing that he  
" was a just man, and an holy,  
" and observed him, and when he  
" heard him, he did many things,  
" and heard him gladly \*." But  
the matter of Herodias was a ten-  
der point, on which the tetrarch  
was not disposed to hear the law,  
because he was not disposed to do  
it. He was determined to perse-  
vere in what was wrong, and his  
monitor to persist in telling him of  
it, without reserve. "John said  
" unto him, It is not lawful for  
" thee to have thy brother's wife."  
John, who had overcome the  
world, could not, either by pro-

\* Mark vi. 20.

mises or threatnings, be induced SECT.  
VII. to recede from his duty, through hope of temporal good, or fear of temporal evil. He was therefore soon convinced, by being carried to prison, that Herod had no farther occasion for his service. And who doth not rather wish to have been imprisoned with him, than to have glittered in all the glories of the throne of Herod ? Happy John, sequestered once more from a troublesome world, to converse with God, and to meditate on that blessed place, and that blessed company, to which he was now hastening !

IN this situation we find the thoughts of the Baptist employed not upon his own sufferings, but upon the interests of his great Master,

SECT. Master, the fame of whose miracles had reached the prison, and sounded in his ears. "When John  
VII.  
"had heard in prison the works of  
"Jesus, he sent two of his disci-  
"ples \*—". Thus the afflictions and tribulations which a Christian must endure for a little season, in the world, should serve only to quicken his desires after his Redeemer, of whose works, wrought in mercy for the children of men, he will often hear; and the contemplation of them should afford him continual delight in the time of his captivity, until the day of his enlargement shall come. With Paul and Silas let him declare the glad tidings of salvation, and sing

\* Matt. xi. 2, &c.

the praises of God in the prison-house. Let him enquire diligently, and take every opportunity of hearing more particulars concerning his Saviour, as also of placing others in the way of information. So will he copy the example of him, who, “when he heard in “prison the works of Jesus, sent “two of his disciples,” that they might be more fully instructed, as to his person and mission.

SECT.  
VII.

FOR that this must have been St. John’s intention in sending them, is plain from the question which they were enjoined to ask ; “Art thou he that should come, “or do we look for another ?” The Baptist could not propose this question for his own information, but evidently for that of his disciples,

SECT. ciples, whose prejudices in favour  
VII. of himself, their first master, he  
found it so difficult to conquer.  
What he had hitherto said having  
proved insufficient for that pur-  
pose, he now, in compassion to  
their infirmity, condescendeth to  
have their scruples propounded in  
his own name ; affording us there-  
by a very useful hint, that in order  
to instruct others, we should abase  
ourselves, and know how to be-  
come weak with those that are so.  
For it often happens, that men  
need information upon some im-  
portant point, who either through  
pride or bashfulness will not ask  
it, or through passion and preju-  
dice will not receive it at our  
hands. In this case, the good,  
which we cannot do directly, we  
must

must contrive, if we can, to do  
indirectly, by proposing those  
questions ourselves, which we  
know that others in company  
want to hear answered, but can-  
not bring themselves to ask. This  
method of edifying the weak,  
without exposing their infirmities,  
will produce in them that love and  
confidence towards us, which, for  
their own sakes, we wish them to  
have. Whereas a contrary con-  
duct, by provoking and alienating  
their affections from us, may put  
it out of our power ever to be of  
service to them again.

T H E same charitable plan is  
carried on by our Lord, who, in  
his answer, instructs the disciples,  
by seeming to instruct their mas-  
ter; “ Go (faith he) and tell John

B b              “ what

SECT.  
VII.

SECT. "what ye have seen and heard."

VII.

And this may suggest a reason, why Christians in general should converse more upon religious subjects, than they are wont to do, both asking questions, like St. John, and returning answers, like Christ, for the benefit and improvement of the by-standers, who may need information, though the person to whom one immediately addresseth oneself, should not. And many a man hath been the better, all his life after, for a seasonable word spoken in common conversation, which is often more regarded and attended to, than a formal discourse from the pulpit.

THE best proofs of a divine mission, which man is capable of receiving, are miracles, evidently  
and

and incontestably such ; miracles, of the reality of which the outward senses, the eyes and the ears, are competent judges ; miracles wrought publickly in the face of the world, in the presence of enemies as well as friends ; and that, not once, or twice, but repeatedly ; and these miracles expressly predicted, hundreds of years beforehand. Such were the proofs offered by Christ to the disciples of John. For “ in that same hour,” while they were present, and before their eyes, “ he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits, and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then said he unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen

B b 2                  “ and

SECT. VII. " and heard ; how that the blind  
see, the lame walk, the lepers  
are cleansed, the deaf hear, the  
dead are raised, to the poor the  
gospel is preached. And blessed  
is he whosoever shall not be of-  
fended in me." As if he had  
said ; I bear not witness of myself ;  
my miracles bear witness of me.  
Only tell John what you have  
heard and seen, and he will teach  
you how to draw the proper infe-  
rence. Isaiah, as he well knoweth,  
did foretell, that when Messiah  
came, he would perform such and  
such mighty works. You your-  
selves are eye and ear witnesses  
of the works done by me. Lay  
the premises fairly together, and  
you cannot be to seek for the  
conclusion.

JOHN

JOHN had engaged his reputation as a prophet, that Jesus of Nazareth, whom he baptized in Jordan, would answer the character of Messiah, and do the works predicted of him ; as appears from John x. 39. where we read, that Jesus, having escaped from the Jews, “ went again beyond Jordan, unto the place where John at first baptized ; and there he abode. And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle : but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there.” Malice itself cannot find reason to suspect a collusion, when prophecies and miracles thus unite their testimony, and proclaim Jesus to be the Messiah.

AT

SECT. VII. AT his word, “the eyes of the blind were opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame man leaped as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb did sing \*;” the leprosy, that foul, contagious, and obstinate disease, for which so many ceremonies of purification were appointed by the law, was healed at once; and the dead in their graves, hearing the voice of the son of man, came forth. Every malady and infirmity, to which the children of Adam were subject, vanished at his presence, and confessed the almighty deliverer of his people. This, therefore, is “He that should come,” nor let us think of “looking for ano-

\* Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

“ther,”

“ ther,” to open the eyes of the understanding, and let in the light of heavenly knowlege upon ignorant and benighted minds ; to remove all obstructions, formed by interest, prejudice, or passion, and give us the hearing ear ; to restore and invigorate the will and affections, that we may make large advances in the course of duty, and run with delight the way of God’s commandments ; to loose the tongues which guilt hath tied, and tune them to hymns of praise and thanksgiving ; to cleanse us, by his blood, from all sin, that leprosy which excludeth from the congregation of Israel, the camp of the saints, and the beloved city ; to raise our souls from death to life, and our bodies from dust to glory.

SECT. glory. " We have found him of  
VII. " whom Moses in the law, and  
" the prophets did write—Rabbi,  
" thou art the Son of God, thou  
" art the King of Israel \*!"

T H E R E is one particular in this answer of Christ, which remaineth yet unnoticed ; " The poor have the Gospel preached unto them." Our Lord here referreth to the celebrated passage in Isaiah, which, in the synagogue of Nazareth, he had expounded, and declared to be fulfilled in himself. " The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings," or the Gospel, " to the meek," or poor ; " he hath

\* John i. 45, 49.

" sent

“ sent me to proclaim liberty to SECT.  
“ the captives,—to comfort all VII.  
“ that mourn, to give them beauty  
“ for ashes, the oil of joy for  
“ mourning \*,” &c. The mean-  
ing of all the figurative expressions  
here used by the prophet, is this ;  
that Messiah should, at his appear-  
ance, confer upon such as were  
disposed to receive them, the two  
great evangelical blessings, namely,  
remission of sins, and a participa-  
tion of the Spirit of joy and glad-  
ness, with which God had “ anoint-  
“ ed him above his fellows.” The  
inauguration of Jesus to all the  
offices of the Messiah, by this  
divine unction, John had beheld,  
when, after his baptism, he saw

\* Isai. lxi. 1.

SECT. the Holy Ghost descending upon  
VII. him, and thereby knew him to be  
that "Rod," or "Branch of  
"Jesse," on whom Isaiah had  
elsewhere foretold, that "the Spi-  
"rit of the Lord should rest \*." Nothing therefore could be more apposite, than this part of Christ's answer, "The poor have the Gof-  
"pel preached unto them;" the full import of which, considered as referring to the LXI<sup>st</sup> chapter of Isaiah, and addressed to St. John, is as followeth—Go shew John again, that the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of might and counsel, which Isaiah foretold should rest upon the Rod and

\* Isai. xi. 1, 2.

Branch of Jesse, and which John SECT.  
VII.  
saw descending and abiding upon  
me, in the likeness of a dove, at  
my baptism, is not departed from  
me. The unction of the Spirit  
was not given me for mine own  
use ; nor is it spent, or consumed,  
although it hath powerfully dif-  
fused itself to all about me. By it  
the poor are made rich, being in-  
stated in the kingdom of grace  
and of the Gospel, and anointed  
heirs unto the kingdom of glory.  
By it every contrite heart is healed ;  
such as were shut up are set at  
liberty ; such as were bound are  
loosed ; and by it the yoke of the  
oppressor is broken \*.

\* See the Works of Dr Jackson, Vol.  
ii. p. 542.

SECT.  
VII.

WE must not omit to mention the *end* for which, according to the prophet, all these changes were wrought in the converts to the Gospel ; “ That they might “ be called Trees of Righteous-“ ness, the planting of the Lord, “ that he might be glorified.” The “ Rod,” the “ Branch of “ Jesse,” the “ Righteous Branch “ of David,” were the known titles of the Messiah, or Son of David ; and it was his glory, while he lived upon earth, to make others, like himself, “ Trees,” or “ Plants of Righteousness.” This expression, as it standeth here joined with others plainly descriptive of evangelical benefits and comforts, unfoldeth to us the true nature of those wonders which Isaiah foretold

foretold should be wrought in the wilderness, and which he hath represented under so rich a variety of poetical imagery ; such as streams of water breaking forth in the desarts, causing them to blossom as the rose ; myrtles coming up, instead of briars ; cedars, firs, and olive trees, instead of thorns, &c. The purport of these figurative predictions appears, by the passage before us, to be this ; that the dry and barren places of Judea, where John baptized, and preached repentance, should, in the days of the Messiah, become a fruitful nursery of a new kind of plants, prepared for the celestial paradise. These were men of humble, peaceable, contrite hearts ; such as poverty and disease had rendered

SECT. VII. rendered those who came to be healed by Christ ; such as the consideration of our sins and infirmities should render us all. To such is the Gospel of the kingdom preached, and they with joy receive it. “ Blessed are the poor “ in spirit ; for theirs is the king- “ dom of heaven. Blessed are the “ meek ; for they shall inherit the “ earth. Blessed are they that “ mourn ; for they shall be com- “ forted.”

To these beatitudes let us add one more, with which our Lord concludeth his answer to the question asked by John's disciples. “ Blessed is he whosoever is not “ offended in me.” In other words—And now, blessed, thrice blessed are all they, who shall so consider

consider the wonderful works done SECR.  
by me, as not to be offended at  
my poor and lowly appearance,  
during the time of my humiliation  
and suffering here on earth ; or at  
the seeming harshness of my salu-  
tary doctrines to flesh and blood.  
For I well know, that many,  
though they have beheld me giv-  
ing sight to the blind, and vigour  
to the impotent, cleansing lepers,  
making the deaf to hear, and rais-  
ing the dead to life again ; yet,  
because the truths, which I deliver,  
are contrary to their interests, their  
pleasures, their pride, their preju-  
dices, which they are determined  
not to quit, even for the kingdom  
of heaven ; many, I say, will re-  
ject what they cannot but acknow-  
ledge to be the counsel of God,  
and

SECT. VII. and put away the word of salvation from them. Let a man only suppress his inordinate desires of things temporal, and he will be disposed to hear what I shall tell him of things eternal. Let him cease to love the world, and he will cease to have any objection to the Gospel. Let but his heart be open to conviction, and when the evidence hath been once fairly laid before him, he will never again ask the question, "Art thou he  
" that should come, or do we look  
" for another?"

S E C-

## SECTION VIII.

### *Considerations on the circumstances of St. John's Death.*

WE have now accompanied Sect. VIII.  
~~~ St. John through the several stages of his life. We have rejoiced with his parents and kinsfolk at his birth, and spent some time in contemplation with him in the deserts ; we have stood by him, as a preacher and a baptist, at the river Jordan, and have been made acquainted with the repeated testimonies born by him, at different times, to the Messiahship of Jesus ; we have heard him, like another Elijah, reproving another Ahab,

D d and

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SECT. VIII. and have visited him in prison, where the glory of his great Master, and the salvation of those committed to his care, still continued to be the objects of his attention. It remains only, that we behold him paying that debt to nature, from which the greatest of them that are born of women are not exempted. And here our acquaintance with him must end, till we meet him in the kingdom of God. Thus do scenes of real life pass swiftly away, and, when looked back upon, appear like those which are described within the compass of a small volume like this. In the course of a few years, the child, at whose birth we made merry, is become a man ; he sickens, and dies, and we mourn
at

at his funeral. Some gleams of SECT.
VIII. success and prosperity, perhaps, brighten and adorn certain parts of his life, as the sun gilds the edges of a dark cloud, or imprints upon it the still more beautiful colours of the rainbow. But while we gaze, the sun sets, the colours fade, the bow vanishes, and “ the “ place thereof knoweth it no “ more.”

Of prophets, as well as of kings, it may be observed, that there is generally but a short interval between their imprisonment and their death; the enmity which occasioned one, seldom leaving them, till it have accomplished the other. And “ more bitter even “ than death itself is the woman “ whose heart is snares and nets,

D d 2 “ and

SECT. VIII. “ and her hands bands *.” Herod had thrown John into prison ; but this would not satisfy Herodias. Even there she heard him still preaching upon the old text, and reproaching her with her crimes. “ She had a quarrel against him ; “ *ενέχειν αὐτῷ, /she fastened upon him,* “ and would have killed him, “ but,” for some time, she “ could “ not †.” For though Herod had not religion enough to produce in him the fear of God, he had policy enough to produce the fear of the Jews, among whom John’s reputation, as a prophet, ran very high. Herodias, however, in her heart, had determined to effect her purpose by procuring, sooner or later, the execution of him whom she

* Eccles. vii. 26. † Mark vi. 19, &c.

falsely

falsely deemed her enemy. As if Sect.
VIII. sin could not be committed with impunity, while John was living to hear of it ; as if his blood would not cry louder than his voice had done ; or the head of the prophet could enter the palace, without reprobating the adultery of the tetrarch. But an imperious lust, in the height of it's career, can brook no obstruction ; and were it possible, as well as necessary, the world itself would be blown up to make way for it.

SIN being once resolved on in the heart, an opportunity of committing it is seldom long wanting ; and the mind is upon the watch, to embrace the very first that offers. “ When a convenient day was come, that Herod’s birth

“ day

SECT. VIII. " day should be kept, he made a great supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee." It is certainly no sin in a prince to keep his birth day, or to make a great supper upon it. But how much it behoveth a man, at such times of rejoicing, to be upon his guard, lest unawares he be induced to sacrifice truth and conscience to mirth and gaiety, the melancholy catastrophe of this banquet may serve to shew us ; since neither Herod, nor any of his guests imagined, when they sat down to table on that fatal evening, how horribly their great supper would conclude. But so it happened, that, before the night was out, a deed was done, which displayed to all succeeding generations

tions the malice and cruelty of SECT. VIII.
~~~~~ Herodias, with the weakness and wickedness of Herod ; teaching us, at the same time, that the greatest of prophets and the best of men are not more secure from violence, than from natural death, but rather more exposed to it than the rest of mankind, if with fidelity and fortitude they execute the trust committed to them.

HERODIAS, by her lawful husband Philip, had a daughter named Salome, who condescended to grace the festivity by dancing before the company, in a manner which “ pleased Herod, and them “ that sat with him.” A pious prelate of our church, in his contemplations on this occurrence, observes, that “ dancing, in itself,

“ as

SECT. " as it is a set, regular, harmonious, graceful motion of the body, cannot be unlawful, any more than walking, or running."

VIII. We may add, that it hath in all ages and nations been one way, and that a natural one, of expressing an uncommon degree of joy and gladness; on which account it was adopted into the number of religious ceremonies formerly enjoined to be observed by the people of God. But for a young lady to appear, as a dancer, before Herod and his " lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee," probably, when they were well warmed with wine, became only the daughter of an Herodias, educated by her own mother.

HEROD, quite overcome and thrown off his guard by Salome's per-

performance, makes her a foolish promise ; and, as if that was not enough, confirms it with a rash oath ; “ Whatever thou shalt ask “ of me, I will give it thee, to the “ half of my kingdom.” A very handsome recompence, one would think, for a dance ! But it will appear presently, that the king had not offered enough. Half his kingdom would not do. Something was required more valuable than the whole of it, had it extended from Judea, quite round the globe. Nothing would satisfy, but his honour, his conscience, his soul ; the price which sin never fails to ask ! The glorious golden opportunity of revenge was not to be lost. Herodias is consulted by her daughter, and lo, the soft, tender,

E e delicate

SECT. delicate Salome reenters, all athirst  
VIII. for blood—" Give me in a char-  
" ger the head of John the Bap-  
" tist ;" of a prophet ; of a per-  
son whom thou knowest to be  
innocent, holy, upright. Make me  
this sacrifice, and I am content.  
With such eagerness and sagacity  
does " the adulteress hunt for the  
" precious life !"

BAD as Herod was, the petition  
of Salome at first shocked him.  
" The king was sorry." He  
thought of John's character, the  
atrociousness of the murder, and  
the opinion which the world would  
entertain of the murderer. But the  
tide, which had ebbed, soon flow-  
ed again, and obliterated, in a  
moment, what had been written  
on the sand, during it's recess.

The

The love of Herodias, the address of Salome, the festivity of the season, and the presence of the "lords and high captains," who had been witnesses of the promise, and might possibly approve the proposal; all these circumstances on the side of the temptation prevailed. And perhaps, Herod, upon recollection, might think that the supposed obligation of his oath would afford him a better excuse than he should ever be master of again, for complying with the importunity of Herodias, and taking off a monitor troublesome to them both. "For his oath's sake, and "for their sakes which sat with "him, he would not reject her." Thus, if any extraordinary wickedness is to be transacted, religion

SECT. must be made a cover for it. As  
VIII. if wrong became right, when acted  
in the name of God ; and it were  
more acceptable in his sight, to  
massacre a prophet, than to re-  
pent of a rash oath made to a  
foolish girl, at a drunken enter-  
tainment.

THE Baptist's fate being thus  
determined, " immediately the  
" king sent an executioner, and  
" commanded his head to be  
" brought : and he went and be-  
" headed him in the prison." This  
deed of darkness must have been  
done in the season proper for it,  
the middle of the night, and St.  
John was probably awakened, to  
receive his sentence, out of that  
sleep, which truth and innocence  
can secure to their possessor, in  
any

any situation. The generality of <sup>SECT.</sup>  
mankind have reason enough to  
deprecate a sudden death, lest it  
should surprize them in one of  
their many unguarded hours. But  
to St. John no hour could be  
such. He had finished the work  
which God had given him to do.  
He had kept the faith, and pre-  
served a conscience void of of-  
fence. He had done his duty, and  
waited daily and hourly, we may  
be sure, for his departure. He  
was now, therefore, called off  
from his station with honour, to  
quit the well-fought field for the  
palace of the Great King; to re-  
fresh himself, after the dust, and  
toil, and heat of the day, by  
bathing in the fountain of life  
and immortality; to exchange his  
blood-

SECT. blood-stained armour for a robe  
VIII. of glory, and to have his temporary labours rewarded with eternal rest ; to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God ; and, as the Friend of the Bridegroom, to enter into the joy of his Lord. From the darkness and confinement of a prison he passed to the liberty and light of heaven ; and while malice was gratified with a sight of his head, and his body was carried by a few friends in silence to the grave, his immortal spirit repaired to a court, where no Herod desires to have his brother's wife ; where no Herodias thirsts after the blood of a prophet ; where he who hath laboured, with sincerity and diligence, in the work  
of

of reformation, is sure to be well SECT.  
received ; where holiness, zeal, and VIII.  
constancy “ are crowned and re-  
“ ceive palms from the Son of  
“ God, whom they confessed in  
“ the world \*.”

So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,  
And yet anon uprears his drooping head,  
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore,  
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky—  
He hears the unexpressive nuptial song  
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
There entertain him all the saints above,  
In solemn troops, and sweet societies,  
That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.

M I L T O N.

\* 2 Esdr. ii. 45—47.

T H E E N D.



